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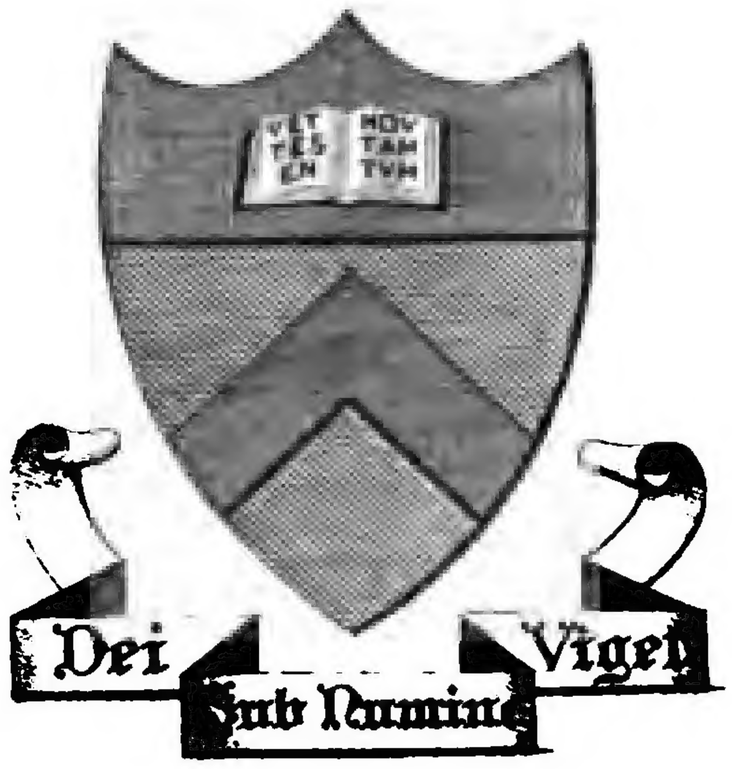
The Girl from the Farm

Gertrude Dix

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THE GIRL FROM THE FARM

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'Two opposed Rights come forth: the one breaks itself to pieces against the other: in this way both alike suffer loss; while both alike are justified, the one towards the other: not as if this were right; that other wrong. On the one side is the religious claim, the unconscious moral habit: the other principle over against it is the equally religious claim—the claim of the consciousness of the reason, creating a world out of itself, the claim to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.'—

HEGEL, *Geschichte der Philosophie*,
Vol. II., page 102.

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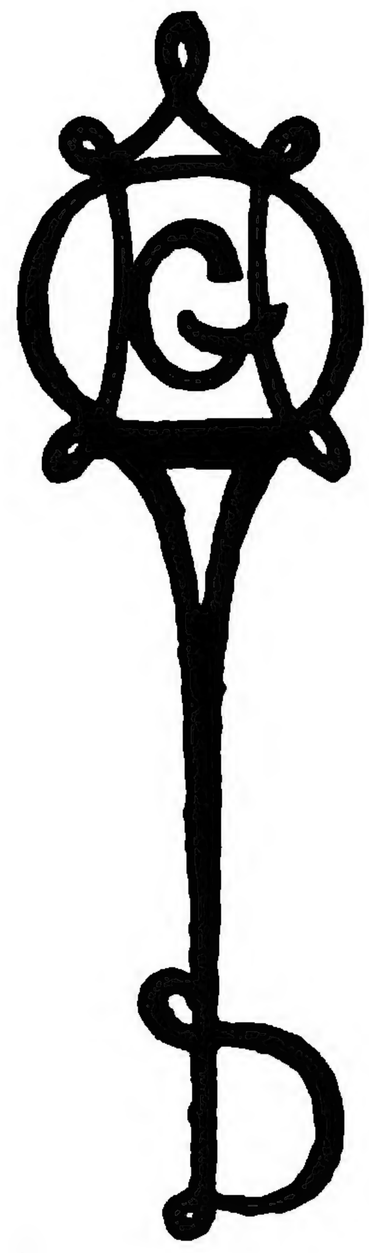
THE GIRL FROM THE FARM

BY GERTRUDE DIX

LONDON: JOHN LANE, VIGO ST.

BOSTON: ROBERTS BROS., 1896

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Second Edition

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THE GIRL FROM THE FARM

CHAPTER I

BETWEEN eight and nine miles from Allington stood a square farmhouse with a background of bleak hill. Around it the country was very thinly populated, dotted at wide intervals with cottages for the hinds, built of grey stone and roofed with slates, colourless where colour was most needed.

The farm itself was of another style of architecture. It had originally been intended as a sort of villa residence, with a pretentious stucco front, which had blistered here and there in ugly patches, emphasised rather than concealed, by a thin coating of whitewash. The once trim garden was now an untidy run for fowls, and a filthy duck-pond took the place of the central flower-bed.

Marchant had seen this house from some

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way off as he traversed the flat valley of unreclaimed land in which it stood. He now seated himself on some tree-trunks, a stone's-throw from its broken gate, and regarded it intently. The uncurtained windows looked at him with a blind stare; the door, with broken hinge, yawned with the eternal *ennui* of an unchanging monotony. Close by, two sentinel poplars—dark and furtive trees—seemed to whisper and beckon to each other the creeping secrets of lives as ugly, colourless, and blind as those of the torpid organisms at the bottom of the pond.

Marchant had walked four or five miles through the damp, level plain, floundering more than once into the boggy land, which had left its traces on his boots and gaiters. Till now he had looked at nothing—preoccupied with the mood of restless discontent which had driven him from house and town into the country. He had felt rather than seen that his surroundings had been depressing without knowing anything of their details—passing on his way much as he might have walked through some gallery of *mediocre* paintings, merely aware of their uniform want of

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individuality, till one should suddenly detach itself from the rest with an imperative demand to be looked at, searched line by line for meanings, and never forgotten.

The ugly, squalid house, with its blistered walls and the sparse nettles at their base, had a fascination for him. He had wanted change and beauty, and the straight, dank valley, bounded on either hand by a low, mist-curtained wall of hills, had brought him to this. He tried to find some explanation for the curious attraction which rooted him to the spot. The air of tragedy which hung about it was due, he thought, to some other cause than the mere disposition of its stones and the signs of neglect and decay about them. Once or twice in his life, other places, with no peculiarities in their physical details, had seemed to single themselves from the rest to appeal to him in this remarkable way with suggestions of horror and crime. He was alive to impressions conveyed thus mysteriously as the sensitised plate is receptive of more than can be perceived by the eyes. He tried to recall the *quasi*-scientific theory which he had himself formed to account for the

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phenomenon. Wearied however, in his attempt to pick up the threads, he relapsed into vague speculations as to the sordid drama of lust or cruelty of which he felt sure this farm of fallen fortunes had been the theatre.

For miles round the trees were few and far between, most of them elms, with bulky trunks and weed-like, unluxuriant tops, dotting the level behind him on either side of the grey streak of road, stretching away as far as the eye could see. The only hill for miles was the solitary mound which rose at the rear of the farm. It was bare of vegetation, except at its remotest edge, where five gnarled hawthorns, bent by centuries of wind, ran one after another down the slope like creatures petrified in flight. The sight of a thin stream of smoke which curled against the hillside from a single chimney, reminded Marchant of his damp condition; and for the first time that day—a proof in itself of the depth of his depression—he drew his cigarette case from his pocket. Further evidence of the despondent mood in which he had set out was revealed to him in the fact that he had forgotten to refill his match-box. It was empty. With an ex-

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clamation of disgust he threw the tiny silver-plated bauble—too small for convenient practical use—over his shoulder into a nettle-bed.

Such match-boxes were an invention of the devil. When he most needed a smoke it was denied him. Well, he must make the best of his way to a railway station and return. He only hoped he might not have far to go. The road which ran opposite the house, passing the fringe of sheds on its left and crossing the level valley without boundary of hedge or tree, did not invite him. He was on the point of rising, when, from a thin plantation on the left, there suddenly emerged the figure of a pedlar with an old-fashioned pack. He stayed where he was, wondering if the inhabitants of the farm bought of pedlars. As he waited, the man stopped, opened his tray, and displaying his wares in front of him, walked in at the broken gate as though he was no stranger. Marchant could see his gestures as he held out one thing after another for sale; but the woman who had come in answer to his summons stood too far back in the shadow of the portico for him to catch a glimpse of

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her. He was all the better pleased. A rosy country wench intent on bobbins and tapes would have been an artistic impossibility. After five minutes or so the pedlar turned away and walked slowly towards the gate, stamping on the vestiges of a path as though to call attention to his departure. A little way along the road, out of range of door or window, in shelter of the furthest of the sheds, he came to a halt, and instead of re-fastening his pack, drew from under a tray half-a-dozen pink-paper-covered books, which he arranged in a frivolous row on the top of his cottons and haberdashery, to their entire concealment. It was plain that he was waiting for some one with whom he had a secret understanding, and his patience was evidently on the point of becoming exhausted, when Marchant, who was looking in the direction of the house, saw a figure appear from one side of it. It was that of a girl, who, avoiding the more obvious way through the garden, slipped through a gap in the hedge, and in a few moments re-appeared at the door of the outbuilding, close to which the pedlar was standing. Neither her shape nor movements

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were those of the bovine country-wench. It suddenly struck Marchant that he wanted matches, and he rose and moved towards the couple, neither of whom heard his approach along the soft mud of the road. It was beginning to rain again. The girl bent intently over the tray of books, regarding one of all the rest with an eagerness expressed in every line of her face and figure.

'I will have this,' she said at last, 'at least—if I have enough money.'

'It's dearer than the others,' answered the pedlar; 'sixpence.'

Her face fell. 'Then I cannot have it,' she faltered; 'I have only fourpence.'

'There are plenty of others to choose from. This, now,' he held up a flaring paper cover—'I'd sooner have this myself. Look at that ship a-fire, and the lady a-clinging to the mast in the middle of the flames.'

But the girl's regard was fixed regretfully on her first choice.

'I want that one,' she sighed in an intent half-whisper. Her inability to possess the crude sentences, badly printed on cheap paper, with the pictured hero on the fly-leaf, pour-

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trayed in exact conformity to the ideal of a barber's block, involved the keenest disappointment. To an ordinary observer there would have seemed nothing to choose between any two of the literary productions on the tray ; to her, for some reason, this one eclipsed all the rest so completely that they were comparatively undesirable. Marchant looked at her unperceived. She was young, unformed, angular, and might well have been the victim of frequent hard words, even of blows. There was about her a restrained and blighted air, like that of a flower which has grown on poor soil. He observed to himself that she was a lily on a dung-hill ; that she belonged to the picture ; that in certain ways the influence of the strange house was upon her, though in others she had escaped it.

The rain began to fall still more heavily, and to blot the thin paper covers.

'Come, lass, come,' said the pedlar ; 'it's heavy work when you're so slow in coming to a point. Make your cakes quicker, or they'll be sad eating. Your sweetheart won't stand first on one leg and then on another, as I'm doing, while you are waiting to say yes. He'll

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be off to the wench round the corner that can give him a quick answer.'

'I might save up,' she meditated. 'Will you be coming soon again?'

'Ay, in a canny bit. Maybe three weeks or so.'

'At the sound of wheels in the distance, he looked along the road, and both perceived a stranger, who approached with the air of a purchaser.

The pedlar was known ironically as 'Handsome Jack.' His coarse, brown skin was pitted with the marks of small-pox. He was square, short, and straddle-legged, yet the girl had always thought him rather less, than more, repulsive than the men among whom she lived. The stranger towered full head and shoulders above the top of his dog-skin cap. He was tall, straight, clean-limbed, and unbent by the hard labour which divides the adult agricultural labourer into two classes—the middle-aged and the old. His clothes were things of individual colour and texture, unstained with wind, weather, and earth in that hard warfare in which Nature sets her own livery upon her assailants, as if in proof that she is stronger

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than they. His manners, mode of speech, way of standing and moving, were the result of generations of freedom from excessive manual toil. He belonged to the race of masters. To the girl, with her dower of imagination fed with a romance of unreality, he was the inhabitant of another world—that heaven of her dreams in which all men and women were wonderful and gracious beings, beautifully clothed and housed, exempt from toiling and from spinning by divine right. She forgot the rain, the pedlar, and her disappointment in a momentary admiration, bold in its self-forgetfulness. The stranger bought matches, and put down a large piece of silver in payment, and the pedlar began to fumble for change, talking all the while. Was there nothing else with which he could oblige the gentleman? Could he not supply him with anything in the way of haberdashery? Or did he wish to make a present to a lady—here was his opportunity. Here were needle-boxes, ribands and laces, which a pretty lass not so very far off would give him a curtsey or a kiss for. 'Handsome Jack' turned to her with a leer of good-fellowship. She blushed crimson with anger

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and shame, and turning suddenly passed into the out-house. Midway between the two thresholds she came to a stand, her eyes fixed, without seeing them, on the great pools which covered the yard beyond the door in front of her, into which the rain-drops now began to fall heavily. That was a man of the enchanted outer world! How different from the men she knew—how noble and splendid! If she could only see him again! But what would he think of her after the way in which the pedlar had spoken? Would he suppose——? She took a few reluctant steps in the direction of the yard, and stopped midway across the floor. Which way would the stranger go? Perhaps Allington—that great and marvellous place to which she had once been taken, with the many houses, the dwellings of divine beings like him-himself, with the same soft speech and fine clothing.

Suddenly she became alive to the fact that it was raining very fast, as the moving rings upon the pools grew wider. Would he find shelter? Where was he now? What had happened in the road since she turned her back upon it? Forgetting her abstraction, she

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listened intently as the sound of wheels came splashing through the mud, and a vehicle drew up close to the out-house wall. The pedlar's voice answered in response to a cheery offer of a lift, and the pedlar's clumsy movements were audible as he climbed up into the cart. Would the stranger go too? So far as she could judge, he had not done so, for the wheels rolled on again immediately. She must go back. She was glad she had seen him, though she might never do so again. She shut her eyes, the more completely to conjure up his image. As she did so, there was a slight movement behind her. She turned. The subject of her thought was standing in the open doorway, hat in hand. It was raining hard; might he shelter for a few moments? She made some unintelligible reply, which he translated into an assent.

In the near, disturbing presence of this wonder of the unknown, outer world, her heart beat fast, and the mental image which a few moments ago had been so clear to her, wavered, and was broken up like a reflection in troubled water. Humiliated by the thought that he might still be thinking of her in the light of the

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pedlar's hateful aspersion, passionately eager for some word or look from this gracious being that would show her that after all he did not so misjudge her, she hesitated between conflicting desires to escape and to remain. Standing thus, bareheaded, under the broken rafters, she gave no sign of the emotions which alternately prompted her to go or stay. To the onlooker she was merely a pale slim girl, whose claim to prettiness it was rather hard to decide, waiting patiently for the storm to pass.

The out-house was a rudely-walled space, which, like the rest of the farm-buildings, had fallen into decay. A large portion of the dilapidated roof had disappeared altogether, while that which remained was little more than a lacework of rotten beams, to which the thatch adhered only in places. The middle of the floor, in which the girl was standing, afforded little better shelter than the open road, and only in the corner nearest the outer door was there any real refuge from the rain. During the next five minutes it seemed to do its best to find new doors of entrance overhead, pouring down here and there in continuous little streams.

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The stranger was the first to perceive that drops were falling on the shoulders of her thin print dress. Still afraid to look at him, she heard him move. Perhaps he was already going! No, it was towards her that he came. Another moment and she felt herself gently enveloped in something soft and warm. His large Inverness cape completely covered the upper part of her body from neck to waist.

The immediate effect of his action was not lost upon Marchant. At his touch the pale, cold, timid creature was transformed; the girl became a woman. Rosy colour dyed her cheeks, and her down-cast, brown eyes were raised to his, filled with a dog-like gratitude out of all proportion to the benefit conferred. He did not despise her, then! How kind he was, how very kind! In all her life no one had ever shown her consideration such as this. As a matter of course she had borne the brunt of the most inclement weather; her worst physical discomfort had been the occasion of jest rather than sympathy. In the kind warm atmosphere that surrounded her, she breathed freely, forgetting all her timidity and shame. The thick folds of the cloak had magic in

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their touch, as though they had belonged to some mantle of enchantment, and the stranger who had bestowed it upon her took his place at the head of the heroic and divine beings, who sat enthroned in the high places of her imaginary world.

Faster and faster fell the rain. Dear rain, kind rain! that made them prisoners together, she had no desire that it should cease! Neither on his part had Marchant. This sensitive girl appeared to him in the light of a discovery—like a rare jewel hidden away amongst lumber. He might have hesitated on the chivalrous loan of his own garment to a less dainty and attractive creature, but as it was, even her poor clothes did not jar on his æsthetic sense. A lily on a dunghill! He repeated his simile to himself with pleasure in its aptness. Who would have expected to find a like treasure in this place of all others? Whence came those beautiful brown eyes and lips like twin flowers? What a pity philanthropists like his mother did not expend some of their energies on behalf of girls like this, instead of putting off all assistance till they had grown ugly, or got into trouble. They were a set of muddle-

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heads, leaving such creatures to a life of degrading poverty and toil, when a little timely help might have transformed them. In imagination he saw himself in the light of a future reformer, bestowing benefaction on poor but interesting damsels. He begged her to come into the comparatively dry corner in which he was standing, declaring that he could not monopolise the best shelter the place afforded, and they stood together, side by side.

He asked her questions. She had lived in this place all her life; had never heard tell of either father or mother; the people at the farm, who were not related to her in any way, had taken her 'out of charity.' He mentally corrected his own simile. Lilies do not grow on dunghills, but are sometimes by accident found there. Influences other than those of the rough, coarse people among whom she lived, had moulded this creature into her far-away unlikeness to the ordinary country girl. It was doubtless a question of heredity. The father and mother, of whom she knew nothing, had left her a heritage of spiritual and physical characteristics, which, if they had never been developed, had as certainly never been blunted

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or coarsened. It might even be that her mother had belonged to the more educated classes, and, deserted and in trouble, had come to this out of the way spot to die unknown, and in a strange place. This was so much mere speculation; but one thing at least was certain,—the child, whatever her parentage, had been left with the cruel inheritance of a nature with a capacity for pleasure she might never enjoy, and a susceptibility to pain which many years of a hard and laborious life would not deaden. Her experiences of life were limited. Once or twice she had been to Allington, to the fair; when she could afford it, she bought books from the pedlar on his periodical visits; for the rest, the words 'I work' summed up the whole of her existence. Doubtless the people at the farm had shown hard commercial wisdom in taking her 'out of charity.' Poor little thing!

The fact that this strange man should ask her questions about herself, should condescend to interest himself in the details of her life, lifted her to a giddy height within his reach. He lived in Allington, the great and marvellous place, with its church above the river,

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its shops full of wares, of which she hardly knew the use, its houses, which were the dwellings of marvellous beings like himself. He lived there in that dignified, beautiful place, a king and prince among the rest. It might be that she had even seen the very house he dwelt in at the end of one of those trim gardens, through the gates of which she had peeped, where gracious beings sat beneath the trees, or played at games in light cool garments.

Inside she could guess a little of what the houses were like, with carpets according to the description of the novelettes, so soft that the feet sunk into them; with low luxurious chairs and tables, and books everywhere with gilt edges. For a moment she allowed herself a vivid picture of herself amid this splendour. She trod the stairs and floors with trailing draperies of silk, which made a pleasant murmur as she moved. Every one about her was soft-voiced, kind, and pleasant; she might do as she chose, buy what things she liked; better than all this—but the vision grew too dazzling, and she fell to earth and cold reality. He was going away to these things she would never

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see. To-morrow would be just the same as all other days. She would never see him again. Her work was waiting for her even now, as it would always do. Vaguely she realised that the morrow would be just like other days. She would come down in the dim, raw morning to rake the ashes out of the grate, and light the fire. She would milk the two dejected cows in readiness for the cart that carried their poor yield away to the town. She would get the breakfast ready, and the details of the day's work would go on as usual, in fetching and carrying from slopstone to hearth, and from hearth to slopstone,—in feeding the animals, and in attending to the wants of the human creatures of the place, who were just other and more exacting animals than the pigs and the hens. To-morrow would wear itself into night; night would bring the prospect of other to-morrows in endless vista. She shivered slightly under Marchant's cloak.

Her companion looked out at the diminishing rain-drops, and consulted his watch with a mental calculation as to the distance that lay between him and dinner. He ought to start in a short five minutes. He glanced at the girl

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who was standing a few paces from him :—the blighted expression had returned to her face, and her figure seemed to have shrunk visibly under the folds of his Inverness. At this moment she turned, and their eyes met.

'Come!' he exclaimed, encouragingly, 'you look quite mournful. What have I done? Have I offended you?'

She shook her head for reply.

'Then don't be so unkind as to send me away without a smile.' For the first time he thought he could see faint traces of tears about her eyes. 'You poor girl,' he continued, 'forgive me if I am a brute—but I believe you have been crying.'

His kind and sympathising tones were as grateful to her as a healing touch upon a sore, and her thoughts immediately expressed themselves in her eyes.

'Those scoundrels ill-treat you, then!' he exclaimed, with an angry glance in the direction of the farm.

A frightened 'Hush!' from her confirmed him in his suppositions better than words would have done. He was conscious of an inrush of chivalrous feeling. His mind re-

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verted to the philanthropists, and he had a wild idea of getting some one of them to interest himself in her case. His question as to what was now to be done, applied as much to her deliverance as to his deeply felt desire to see her look happy and charming again.

'You can't stay here all your life, of course,' he continued. 'It's a shame these people should have got hold of you.'

Her thoughts echoed his words—'a shame.' He knew, then, without any telling, that she was unhappy and over-worked. She pondered half in wonder at this strange man's sympathy, half in deepened consciousness of the meshes about her feet. Hilary Marchant's desire to lead her back to a lighter plane of feeling was for the moment clouded by a real instinct of pity. What great barriers separate human creatures from each other; how difficult, nay, impossible, it was to do a radically kind act without misunderstanding! The world had become so prosaic that any assistance from man to woman, not on its own conventional lines (he was vague enough as to the form it would take in this particular instance) would

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be branded at once as quixotic, or misunderstood and maligned.

He once more broke the silence.

'A penny for your thoughts!' he said, with a slight movement towards her.

She answered him frankly enough. 'I was wishing I were you,' she said. 'What wouldn't I give to be able to live at Allington.'

His own grievance at having to live there at all was uppermost in his reply. 'It is indeed a place of lively and stirring interests,' he said, with a sarcasm which was quite thrown away on her. 'But why shouldn't you live where you please,' he continued. 'A pretty girl can generally do as she likes, can't she?'

Pretty! he called her pretty. She took a step or two away from him with raised head and elastic carriage. She had doubted often as to whether she had any claim at all to good looks, hardly daring to flatter herself with the idea that she possessed any of the charms attributed to adorable heroines of romance. Her thoughts flew to the Lady Angelas and Blanches of her novelettes, as though she were not after all so far from their company. Was it after all impossible for her to be like those

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blest and glorious beings, admired and loved? To them beauty had always been the key to the summit and crown of their desires. Could she but go to Allington, all good fortune might wait upon her also. To Allington—to Allington—but how?

Absorbed in her own thoughts, she lost consciousness of Marchant's presence, and a remark by which he sought to attract her attention fell unheeded on her ears. What was to be her first step towards Allington and the world? A daring thought began slowly to shape itself in the region of possibilities. What others had done she might do also. A sequence of pictures formed themselves vividly in her brain, in which she saw herself the heroine. It was early morning, a fortnight later in the year, when the sun rose a little earlier than at present. With the first faint light, for which she had been watching, she rose from her bed, dressed herself carefully in clean, mended clothes, took the few coins from her secret store, and with a bundle, containing all her worldly possessions, crept stealthily down the creaking, uncarpeted stairs. The light came faintly through the shutters of the

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living room as she passed through it for the last time, and along the passage, at the rear of the house to the door, the bolts of which should have been well oiled beforehand. Once outside, she would creep round the house, out of the way of the dogs, reach the road, put on her shoes in the shelter of the out-house. At half-past five or so, by the time she had walked on a mile or two, a market cart, than which the sun itself was not more constant, would pass along the road, and stop to give her a lift. So she would ride easily to Allington. Once there, the rest would not be so very difficult. Country girls were in request as servant maids, and 'service' promised the first step of an enviable career.

In her abstraction she did not notice that Marchant was watching her with a puzzled, half-piqued expression, ascribing her silence to a coquettish feint of displeasure at his compliment.

'What on earth do you find of such tremendous interest in that bit of wall?' he inquired, banteringly.

As he spoke a ruddy shaft of sunset light pierced into the dimmest recesses of the out-

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house, and both turned simultaneously to the door at their rear. The sinking sun had broken through the clouds, which flamed at their edges as though they burned with fire. A stormy crimson light suffused the open spaces of the sky, which grew rapidly wider, and were reflected in the pools and long wet roads across the valley, till they gleamed like fiery water courses. The girl pointed to the widest and brightest of these.

'That's the way to Allington,' she cried, 'Look, it's a golden road!'

CHAPTER II

'THE witch!' exclaimed Marchant to himself; 'the witch!'

Two hours' brisk walking brought him to the town of Allington, and he climbed its steep streets in a pleasant anticipation of dinner, passing the same dull, little shops, the same quiet, respectable houses with which he had been all his life acquainted. To-night he experienced a sort of indulgent pity for the people who lived in them. The mild young ladies he met on philanthropic errands, the energetic curate who cannoned into him at a sharp corner, even the smug tradesmen who obsequiously bade him good evening as he passed, were all unconscious objects of his commiseration. Poor things! They never lived; were content to pass their days in a mere jog-trot existence; hardly knew what enjoyment was! In buoyant spirits he changed

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his clothes in time to dutifully escort his mother across the hall to the dining-room, with the declaration that a *tête-a-tête* dinner with her would be delightful.

On the appointment of a new dean in a neighbouring cathedral town, it had been urged as an objection against him by a celibate minor canon that he had a wife, and this objection had been met and over-ruled by the fact that the lady in question 'never did anything.' It would have been impossible to advance such a plea on behalf of Mrs Marchant. Energetic and capable woman as she was, she prided herself on having spent the best years of her life in making Allington the very model of a cathedral town—a centre of active philanthropy, instead of a mere sleepy hollow, visited by occasional tourists. In her younger days, as the wife of a vicar of a large and fashionable parish, she had found time hang heavily on her hands, and had suffered from fits of hypochondria, which bazaars and zenana missions were not of sufficiently frequent occurrence to dispel. Her advent in Allington had marked an epoch, and it was owing to her unflagging spirit and zeal that the machinery of missions,

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soup-kitchens, and refuges worked among the not inconsiderable population in the straggling rows of houses which made a new fringe to the old town. Through her instrumentality the whole face of the place was altered, and she liked to think that her efforts were rendered all the more necessary, from the fact that her husband was too much engrossed in abstruse studies to have any time left for philanthropy. Alive to the exigencies of the time, she marshalled her forces against the evil-minded agitator and the Salvation Army captains, who turned up at Allington street corners as elsewhere, that the one might be refuted with safe and sober church views and counsels on thrift and contentment, and the other with sound theological doctrines on the means of grace and sacerdotal authority. From her father, a clever architect in his day, she had inherited a strong predilection for planning and building, and her ambition had long centred in the erection of some charitable institutions necessary to the well-being of the town, in designing the plans of which she had spent some of the happiest hours of her life. One was now no longer a mere castle in the air. The first storey

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of a new and commodious penitentiary, built in grey stone, already showed itself on the outskirts of Allington. Among the desires she still cherished unfulfilled, one was to see her husband a bishop; another to witness a complete restoration of the cathedral. It vexed her that the Dean should set his face like a flint against any such scheme. While he took great pains to prevent the noble walls from actually falling into ruin and decay, he studiously avoided that 'real and practical renovation which would have been in the end so much cheaper, and more satisfactory.'

Mrs Marchant contemned half measures as heartily as she adored thoroughness.

In appearance the wife of the Dean of Allington was a large and handsome woman, of imposing presence, with abundant hair, which promised soon to attain the crowning whiteness associated with benevolence. On occasions of state or importance she wore gold pince-nez, though her sight, like all her other faculties, was perfectly keen and unimpaired. She dressed in rich silks and fine lace, and her large, white, well-covered hands carried one or two costly rings. It was a matter of regret to

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her that her son had not inherited her excellent constitution. Indeed, he was far less robust than his sister, and among other characteristics, like his father, had long and nervous hands, never for a moment still. To-night it pleased her to see him look handsome and well.

'I wish, Hilary,' she said, as she looked across the table at her favourite, 'that now you have begun long walks you would keep them up. Too close study is not good for you.'

'You are right, mother. It isn't good for any of us. We all want to live more in the open air and the sunlight—to return to Nature, you know.'

Mrs Marchant cut the stalk of a bunch of hot-house grapes with an air of slight disapproval. 'That is all very well in theory, Hilary,' she said, 'but it is absurd in practice.'

'That is what you say, mother. Nevertheless, what we really want is simplification of life.'

'Ah,' returned Mrs Marchant, 'people talk a great deal of nonsense about Nature and simplification of life. Of course you don't mean it, Hilary; but it is the sort of thing one should be on one's guard against. There is that Mr

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Gardener Katharine knows, who writes books about it, and goes to *absurd* extremes. He was an Oxford man, yet he actually lives with quite poor people in their *hugger-mugger* way (I do not like that term, but I don't know else how to express what I mean), and earns a living by market-gardening—or was it making sandals?—calls himself a socialist, and positively declines to live on some property which was left him. I do not think it could have been much, or he would not be so foolish. A friend of mine who met him said she was surprised to find him quite a gentleman, and that of course makes it all the more regrettable.'

'I wish,' said Hilary, 'one need not have the bother of peeling one's apples. It seems a thing that ought to be done *for* one.' After a pause, he continued rather irrelevantly, 'I sometimes think farming would suit me better than the law.'

Mrs Marchant rose. 'My dear,' she said, 'I wish you would not talk so wildly.'

In the drawing-room Hilary sat down to the piano, and played one thing after another by fits and snatches. In the midst of some desultory bars, he turned and saw that his mother had brought a small pile of leather-covered

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books to the marble-topped writing-table, and was carefully examining the pens in the stand. He left the music-stool, and, after a few preliminary inquiries, plunged into some accounts for her. His mother, with the remark that she would be glad of a rest, took some knitting from a basket and seated herself in an easy chair. Repose and quiet for her were synonymous with the construction of thick woollen garments for deep-sea fishermen. Her needles moved briskly under her white fingers as she worked away contentedly. Her son was with her. It was needless to regret that her daughter Katharine did not sit in the opposite chair engaged on another of those important stockings she found it so difficult to finish, and that the Dean never by any chance visited the corner she had specially designed for him. Both were away; but had they been at home she sighed to think how the former would probably have still been poring over crabbed texts and almost illegible manuscripts. Having reached the beginning of her heel, she forgot everything else in the counting of her stitches, and finished it off without a pause. After half-an-hour's work, she looked up for the first

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time, and was seized with the uncomfortable suspicion that Hilary was drawing on her new blotting-paper—a suspicion verified on the next day by the discovery of a sketch of what looked like a dilapidated house. In a few moments he declared the accounts finished, seated himself on the sofa, and began to read one of those French books which she so disliked to see left about, as 'one never could tell what might be in them.' His reading did not take him much further than a single definition—' L'amour, c'est l'échangement de deux fantaisies et le contact de deux epidermes.' He borrowed a pencil from her to underline the sentence, and make a severe mark of interrogation against it on the margin. Then he moved restlessly to the window.

For some time there was no other noise than the light sharp sounds his mother's needles made one against the other. By and bye she broke the silence. 'Did you meet any one when you were out, Hilary?' she asked.

'Mary Brown, mother.'

'I suppose she had been down to Barton Mills. She is most regular—a nice girl, Hilary.'

'My dear mother, of all the sickly, passive,

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uninteresting creatures, Mary Brown is——' Hilary shrugged his shoulders and was silent.

'I don't know what you mean,' said his mother. She may not perhaps be clever, but she is a most sensible young woman, exceedingly good with poor people. Kate Henderson was here to-day. You used to like her.'

'Curiously enough, I did,' thought Hilary to himself. He could have said more in his scathing contempt for the unoffending young ladies of Allington—brainless nonentities; one or two of them with little tricks and allurements of their own, by which he had once or twice almost allowed himself to be caught. A woman without veneer or polish, without accursed conventionalities of manner and feeling, capable of impulse, even of abandonment, would be worth the whole of them a thousand times over.

'I am beginning to think, mother,' he said, turning from the window after a pause, 'that education is often a mistake.'

'*Board School* education, Hilary,' said Mrs Marchant, laying her knitting impressively in her lap, 'is a great mistake.'

'H'm,' said Hilary, 'perhaps you are right.'

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The girl could read, yet it seemed unlikely she could ever have received much schooling.

'I do not know,' continued his mother, 'to what we are to ascribe the altered manners of the lower classes if not to that. They are now *odious* where they were once *respectful*. I always make a point of rewarding any child who pulls his cap or makes me an old-fashioned curtsey. Yet I do not think I have spent more than a shilling in that way for years.'

Hilary, with a meditative air, pulled one of the long stockings out of her basket, and regarded it intently. She felt sure they were agreed on the subject of Board Schools.

A little before she retired a telegram arrived from the Dean to say that he would return late that night, and Hilary dutifully resolved to sit up for him. In spite of his long walk, he was still restless and disinclined to sit still, much more to go to bed; and the bright moonlight without invited him to smoke in the garden, where, with a greatcoat and a cigar, he felt himself completely fortified against the keen night air. The flower garden sloped from a wide terrace at the back of the house to a low

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wall, from which it was possible to see some way up and down the river, and to command an extensive view of its wooded banks. The night was cold and still, like a beautiful cup without wine. The river lay in the hollow of the dark woods touched with faint silver, curving round with the darkness on the left, running on to the bridges where the gas-lamps glittered on the right. Silence reigned everywhere, only broken at the quarters by the ringing of the chimes. The bare, pure sky was filled with the radiance of the moon. There was no movement either in heaven or earth. It was difficult to believe that this same world of soft, pale light and mysterious shadow had been the sphere of storm, swift-moving cloud, and fiery sunset. Oh, that red warm glow! Hilary strode along the garden paths impatiently. This calm distracted him. And he had lost his match-box—the small silver match-box his mother had given him, which he must certainly make an effort to recover. Tired of the garden's narrow limits, he opened the door in the wall and went down the steep path to the river. To-morrow he must go and look for his lost piece of property. There would be no

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harm in that. Harm! What possible harm could there be in seeking for a lost article! The river was running swiftly and with full current, swollen by the recent rains. To-morrow the state of the skies gave promise that it would be fine. It would be interesting to see whether the farm looked as desolate a blot upon the landscape in the sunshine as it did in the rain. He thought it would. Light was powerless to lift the gloom of some few places—some walls, some doors and windows defied all its efforts to make them look cheerful. Should he go to-morrow, or should he wait? The walk would be good for him. He had determined to keep up regular exercise. He returned to the house intent on hunting up his sketching materials, which he had not used for some time. On the whole, it would be best to go to-morrow. There were cows about the place. His property might be trodden into the damp ground, and rendered impossible of recovery. Should he go in the morning? That would interfere with his work. He wäs inclined to think the afternoon or evening would be better. As he meditated, he heard the click of the latch-key in the front-door and a step

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across the hall. Breaking off his unfinished search for block and colours, he went down stairs. The Dean had returned.

The Dean was tall and thin, with a scholarly stoop in his shoulders. His hair was dull grey, untouched by silver; his eyes sunken, and his thin lips set close together, as though with a painful determination. Animals driven to hard toil come to acquire in time a sort of pathetic dignity. Such a dignity belonged to the Dean. He was a man of an originally delicate constitution, rendered still more feeble by a life of sedentary labour—a labour at one and the same time his solace and his bane, the one thing he had to live for; the thing that made life hardly worth living. In build and general *physique* he resembled his son; in manner he was totally unlike him, for Hilary's restlessness was superseded by a restraint and calm which verged upon the passivity of ill-health. Outwardly, at least, he seemed to have learned the lesson of conserving the little energy he possessed. To-night he looked more than usually weary as the faithful Jenkins helped him take off his coat. In the dining-room a small fire had been kept alight, and a brass kettle was

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boiling over a spirit-lamp. He was very tired, almost too exhausted to feel the relief of being once more at home. Jenkins stayed to make him his usual cup of cocoa, and to hand his plate.

'I wish,' he said, as the door closed on his retreating figure, 'you good people would not trouble to sit up for me.'

Hilary's carving of the cold chicken betrayed a certain amount of irritation. Really there was no pleasure in sitting up for people who were so ready to dispense with a welcome. His father took a few mouthfuls of food, and pushed his plate away from him. He himself was hungry, and inclined to eat heartily. It is annoying to have to satisfy a good appetite while one's sole companion eats nothing.

'You don't seem to have much appetite, father,' he said, as he helped himself a second time.

'No,' the Dean smiled rather bitterly. 'If you will excuse me, Hilary, I will turn to the fire.' He suited the action to the word.

To tell the truth, the sight of his son annoyed him. He was almost jealous of his own flesh and blood. If he had had all that strength

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and health, to what good use would he have put it rather than have allowed it to lie idle, as this son of his, for whom all in vain he had planned a fair future.

'I suppose you finished your work sooner than you intended,' said Hilary, cheerfully.

The words were curiously apposite.

'Yes,' he answered, 'I finished the work far sooner than I expected.'

Hilary poured himself out a glass of wine. 'And you cleared up all those knotty points with Professor *What's his name?* Is there anything definitely settled about publishing?'

'Nothing yet,' replied the Dean. He winced at the thought that, owing to circumstances, with which he had just become acquainted, nothing ever would be settled. After so much promise, there would be no performance. People would shrug their shoulders, and quote the proverb about the mountain in labour. All that humiliation was to come. He sat through his son's chatter, impatiently wishing it at an end, till at last he went up to bed. Then he took his candle, and opened the door of his study. At the end of the room was a cabinet, from the shelf of which he took a great

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pile of manuscript, which he carried to the table. He then lit the lamp, and the two wax lights upon his desk, and began to sort and classify the different sections of which it was composed. The writings were difficult to decipher. He fetched another pair of candlesticks from the mantelpiece, and still the light was insufficient. Then he pushed the pile away from him.

'It is impossible,' he said.

He remembered how once before that day he had used the same phrase with different significance. In imagination he lived the last ten hours over again. He again descended the steps of the house of the great eye-specialist and looked through the iron railings of the square in which it stood, dimly conscious of the grass and shrubs, and the children at play there. His eyes were dazzled, not with the sunshine, but by the piercing light which had touched his eye-balls with a first sensation of pain in the dark room while the physician examined them. It was then he had said to himself, in his incredulity, 'It is impossible,'

A week ago he had come to town to look at

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some manuscripts in the British Museum that he wished to examine with reference to his work. As his sight had been troubling him slightly for some time past, it had occurred to him as a happy thought that he might see some oculist there, and so avoid a consultation with his own family physician, and all the inquiry and gossip such a proceeding would involve. The ailment had appeared to him a very slight one, nothing more than what a simple prescription or change of spectacles would remedy. The oculist's request that he should pay him another visit after some days' use of certain drops, had seemed to him only a piece of unnecessary professional fuss, and had not there been other business to detain him in town, it is possible he might never have paid it. The specialist's verdict—total blindness within the next twelve or fourteen months, had come upon him with a sudden, terrible shock. For one moment he had been incredulous; the next he had reflected that nothing in human affairs that is cruel, malignant, and destructive, is impossible. He drew out his watch. Red, orange, and purple motes, with distinct rings and haloes, danced

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on the white face, as on everything else he looked at. It was half-past three: he was late; he usually reached the museum half-an-hour earlier. A hansom came bowling along the smooth street. He hailed it, in order that he might save five minutes. Leaning back into the shadow, he felt with relief that his sight was regaining its normal condition. He shut his eyes in a vain attempt to rid himself of the motes, and their swift, rhythmic motion. In a year there would be nothing but that darkness, unrelieved even by those tormenting blots of colour. And his work. What of his work? How much of it could be done in one short year of fading sight? Could it be that his great scheme, his year-long ambition, the one interest of his life was to be destroyed at a blow?

Only yesterday he had discussed the scheme of it with the editor of the leading journal of philological research, who expected interesting results from its publication. He had planned that it would take him fully a year of steady work to get it ready for the press. How much of it was possible of accomplishment in a few months of rapidly failing

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sight? Had he sinned that God should punish him like this! Had he not repented of his doubts! Had not this selfsame work been a refuge in which he had sought relief from them; a bulwark he had raised, behind which to entrench himself! Now, at the very moment when he had gathered so much raw material together, held the very threads in his hands ready to be woven into warp and woof, the whole must slip unfinished from his powerless grasp. As though from mere force of habit he entered the Museum reading-room. He made out a list of the works on which he was engaged, destroyed it, consulted the catalogues, and made another of various books on diseases of the eye, which he placed in the basket. It seemed to him that he had to wait at his desk an interminable time before the volumes were brought to him. For an hour or more he read eagerly all that he could find which seemed in any way to bear upon his case. With the book before him he called to his remembrance various signs and symptoms he had passed over almost without notice at the time he had experienced them, and which now ratified with unassailable evidence

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the verdict of the physician. Nowhere was there any loophole of escape. When he left the Museum he no longer found it in his heart to say, "It is impossible." Nothing now remaining to be done in London, he made the necessary arrangements for his departure.

. . . . .

In the cold of the early morning the candles burned down in their sockets, and the Dean rose from his sitting posture aware that his limbs were stiff and numb. As he did so he remembered he had not looked to see if there were any letters, and crossed the room in order to do so.

Over his mantelpiece was a picture of Fortune and her Wheel, which his daughter Katharine had given him. He thought of the jeer of St Augustine at the goddess, sometimes good and sometimes bad. But this Fortune of the modern artist was not the fickle, smiling demon of the Saint's animadversions, whom worshippers of another time had sought to propitiate with gifts. No tears or prayers could move her. She was untouched by pleasure, triumph, or revenge. That man exalted at the summit; this went under, and

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was crushed to death under the same passive, inexorable gaze. In the modern conception, Fortune herself was a mere passive hand, like the wage-worker, a part of the machine. The master was behind. Underneath a quotation was written in the margin :—

"In la sua voluntade è nostra pace
Ella è quel Mare al qual tutto si muove."

"It is God's will," said the Dean, bending his head in resignation—a resignation in which there was no touch of joy or mystic exaltation. To the favoured saint every added cross has solace in its bitterness; is only another proof of the divine love. But for the Dean, in his spiritual dryness, there was no such comfort; so long, in the words of the Psalmist, had God hidden his face from him.

It had not been thus always; far away were the sunlit heights of his youth, days of first love, fervour, and religious enthusiasm. The early months of his marriage had been very happy ones. He had provided his wife with a Hebrew Grammar, she him with a book on the principles of architecture, both of which they had studied together in the purest union of

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souls. Then he had been seriously ill, and it was during his convalescence that he had first begun to have a suspicion that his marriage was not the ideal bond he had imagined. Contrasting his own feebleness with his wife's splendid animal health and strength, he had begun to realise, at first timidly, and as a sort of treason, then with a spiritualism easily shocked and disgusted, the strong basis of physicality in her love for him, and to believe that she secretly despised him for the weakness he could not help. Superior to her in many respects, he began to feel the hopelessness of the fact, that while he should fail to satisfy her in one way, it was hopeless to expect that she should come to recognise his strength in others. All that was best, most subtle, dreamy and delicate in his work evaded her. She would be the good, energetic, managing wife; but it was impossible for her to sympathise with anything of which she could not see the immediate aim and outcome. The gulf had widened. As her character had developed, she exhibited tastes, ideas, and predilections wholly at variance with his own. Her greatest interests appeared

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to him of no moment. She cared nothing for the theological subtleties which engrossed him. The Church had vouched for the one-ness of their flesh; it had not done the same for their unity of spirit. Shortly after the birth of their son, however, there had come a sort of after-glow, some happy days in which more than one circumstance combined to bring them closer together. He began to write a book on the reconcilement of religion and science, and his confidence in himself inspired her in the belief that the work would bring him the fame and popularity her ambition craved for him. Its publication was to be the first step in the rung of the ladder which was to end in a bishopric. Its scheme had her entire attention and approval, and appeared to her far more fitted to the practical needs of the time than any number of essays on "Pelagianizing Tendencies," or the "*Filioque* Clause." Her hopes, alas! were doomed to disappointment. At a certain stage in his work her husband, for the first time in his life, was seized with religious doubt. The weapons he had taken up wherewith to fight the enemy were turned against his own breast. With the first wavering of

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his faith in a revealed God, he began to believe intensely in the Devil. So real and so fiendish in ingenuity were the suggestions which appeared to come from some malignant power outside himself, that he had suffered the acutest mental torture. The ground had slid under his feet, opening into dangerous chasms and abysses, near which it was ruin to tread. He had prayed to a deaf Heaven without consolation, supplicating vainly for guidance and direction. Then for a month he shut up his books, and rigidly disciplined his thoughts into other channels, believing that he should be thus enabled to take up his task again, and proceed with it without distraction. But he had been too sanguine. The flaw in the materials with which he had to work was too apparent. It was impossible for him to go on constructing a wall against the enemy in which he could put his finger on the assailable point. Do as he would—cover it as he might with all his subtlety and skill, the tiny rift was there under the smooth surface. When the waters of rationalism began once to trickle through it, at what point was he to say—"Thus far shalt thou go, and

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no farther." His only safety lay in the abandonment of his design; his only peace in flight; in his turning completely away from the difficulty which beset him. The book he had planned was fated never to be written by him, and he sought refuge in other work. In the nature of things, no explanation of this line of conduct was satisfactory to his wife, one of whose most stringent rules it was to scrupulously finish every task she once began. In this instance it seemed to her that he gave sign of a weakness and want of resolution she would never have expected of him. He was conscious that he fell in her estimation, and their tacit estrangement deepened with a mutual disappointment and irritation.

And then Hilary, his only son, the lad of brilliant promise, had been another source of anxiety and pain to him. His achievements at College had amounted to nothing except in the matter of debts, by which his resources had been crippled for some time to come. Irresolute, unstable as water, he loved to dabble first with one thing and then with another, till the novelty of his occupation had worn off, and he would throw it up for something else. He

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seemed, now at twenty five, as far as ever from any final decision regarding his future.

The clock in the hall struck two, and it was bitterly cold. The Dean returned to the dining-room, and tried in vain to warm himself at the dull embers in the grate. His always bloodless hands and feet were chilled to the bone, and remained so long after he had reached bed, too worn out to be conscious of anything else but mere physical discomfort.

At the end of a week it became necessary for him to get the prescription of the London oculist made up, and he accordingly sent it to his own physician. Dr Vachell, the longest established practitioner in Allington, was a man of parts, of whom the town was justly proud. Although his book on "Family Predisposition in Locomotor Ataxy" had gained him a considerable reputation, he still adhered to the old-fashioned method, and had his medicines made up in his own dispensary; consequently it was not without curiosity that he himself deciphered and prepared the specialist's prescription. A day or two following he took the opportunity of being in the close to drop in at the deanery. He found

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the Dean seated at his writing-table, pale, impassive, difficult of approach. The doctor, however, as a bold and sanguine man, only beat about the bush to the extent a professional delicacy demanded. With great tact he turned the conversation on the Dean's recent visit to London, and thence by an easy step to a little anecdote about his friend Sir Henry Pettigrew, the oculist.

'By the by, my dear sir,' he continued, confidentially, 'since you sent me a prescription with his signature attached to it, I have been feeling a little anxious. As a friend of many years' standing—let me see, twenty years—I should be relieved to know from your lips that the trouble, whatever it is, is not a serious one—just the mere temporary result of overwork we shall be able to set right with rest and care.'

The Dean bent his head wearily. This was the beginning of that hateful commiseration, pity, and gossip he had foreseen.

'I have had some slight discomfort in my eyes some time,' he said. 'I thought nothing of it; however, Pettigrew tells me it is serious.'

The doctor bent forward in his chair. 'And

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yet he has not advised a total suspension of work,' he exclaimed, with a look at the papers on the writing table. 'Yet I daresay you will find any amount of idleness, however slight, irksome.'

'The mischief can't be set right, Vachell,' answered the Dean. 'With care and freedom from mental anxiety I may stave off total blindness for a year. After that it is inevitable.'

Dr Vachell was surprised, shocked, and sorry for his old friend. 'My dear sir!' he ejaculated, and, taking out his pocket handkerchief, he wiped his forehead in a manner which he thought of afterwards as highly unprofessional. 'And there is nothing to be done?'

'Nothing. You are the only person who knows of this, Vachell. I wish the matter to be kept strictly between ourselves.'

'I understand; you wish to confine this distressing piece of intelligence to those within the bosom of your family. I quite understand.'

'Excuse me; I said you were the *only* person who knows.'

The doctor crossed and uncrossed his knees. 'You have—a—not acquainted Mrs Marchant with the melancholy news?'

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'No. I wish no one either within or without my household to know anything till it is absolutely necessary.'

'My dear Dean,' said the doctor, impressively. 'I do hope you are well advised in this course, prompted as I have no doubt it is by the desire not to inflict pain before it is inevitable. You will remember Mrs Bolero—a case of cancer; a most excellent woman. She consulted me in secret, and, by her own desire, suffered in silence for a year before the fatal termination of her disease. There is a stoicism about this sort of thing one can but admire, yet I cannot but fear that it leads to further suffering—the deprivation of so much affectionate sympathy from those from whom we have the right to expect it.'

'I wish silence. They will know soon enough.'

The Doctor bowed his head in solemn promise of secrecy.

'As you will, my dear sir. I only hope that your work may not really suffer. In spite of difficulties, I cannot believe you will allow yourself to be balked. Milton (was it not Milton?) dictated sublime poems to his

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daughters. One has only to look at the charming Miss Katharine to feel that she would not allow herself to be outdone in filial devotion.'

The Dean smiled bitterly, and said nothing. The feminine intellect could hardly be expected to cope with the difficulties of the case. When he spoke it was to change the subject.

It was on the following Sunday that the Dean preached a memorable sermon on conformity to the will of God, choosing as his text the twelfth verse of the fourth chapter of Numbers—'And they shall take all the instruments of ministry, wherewith they minister in the sanctuary, and put them in a cloth of blue, and cover them with a covering of badgers' skins.' His sermons were noted, as a rule, for a certain skilled literary effect rather than for the eloquence of the orator. His clear sentences were always well thought out, and beautifully rounded and finished, while he never repeated himself with the wearisome reiteration of less scholarly divines. People spoke of them in Allington, as elsewhere, as 'an intellectual treat,' and always worth listening to whether they dealt with abstruse points of theological doctrine, or subtle phases of the spiritual life. To-day he

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spoke of the Old Dispensation, under which it was ordained that every article dedicated to the altar and the tabernacle should be wrapped in a blue covering, and only when so concealed borne by the Levites, who might not look upon them uncovered. The bearers of the holy vessels thus felt the weight of their burdens without understanding what it was they carried. It was death to them to search, to pry, to question. They were to carry what was entrusted to them with humility, awe, and confidence. The ways of God are past finding out, and every one who is His servant submits himself without murmur to what is laid on him, without seeking to understand why he should be thus afflicted. He ought not even to desire to know why this or that is commanded or permitted. How much light was vouchsafed to the pagan philosopher? 'Never speak,' he says, 'of having *lost* a thing, but of having *restored* it. Has your child died? He is only given back. Is your estate torn from you? But is that not also restored? Yes; but it was an unprincipled man who seized it, you say. And what does it matter by whose agency He who gave

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it takes it back? As long as He allows the use of it to you, have a care for it as a thing which belongs to some one else, just as a traveller has of his lodging.'

Towards the close of his address the Dean's manner changed. The cold, silvery tones of his voice altered to a golden ring. His bowed head was lifted; his pale face flushed. Excitement kindled in his nerves, and sent the blood quicker along his veins. One of the rare moments of exultation had come upon him. Emotions, thoughts, words were no longer a difficulty painfully sought and painfully expressed. They came to him easily in a strong, smooth current, by which he felt himself borne away. He forgot time, place, himself. A genial warmth thawed the icy barriers about his heart. The blessings of self-abasement and the dew of tears were alike possible to him.

'O God!' he cried, 'I deliver myself entirely to Thy most holy will. I bind myself to Thy Cross, that Thou mayest lead me whither Thou choosest. Take from me all that I possess; strip me of all I have dared to put between myself and Thee, and I will

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not open my lips except in Thy praise. In all afflictions, Thy choice shall be my consolation. I will rid myself of all other desires, strip me of all earthly longings, pray no other prayer than that Thy will be done, for in that alone is my peace; it is the great sea to which all things tend.'

Mrs Marchant was moved by her husband's power. 'If your father, Hilary,' she said as she crossed the close, 'could only sustain that level of eloquence, he would be certain of a bishopric.'

That same afternoon, in his library, the Dean worked among his papers with feverish haste, revising, docketing, making fresh and fuller notes, till the whole mass of manuscript was gone through. By some means or other the work should be completed. What if the oculist had been mistaken? He could see perfectly well. His writing was as clear as ever. After all, suppose it had been only the gas miscroscope which had tried his eyes for the moment, and alarmed him with painful sensations. As he drew near the end of his task, however, the motes began to appear on the paper, at first slowly and at intervals, then

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succeeding each other in a maddening race, blurring the page till it was impossible for him to write on it. He leaned back in his chair. There was a mist over each corner of the room —a mist which began to rise and spread, shutting out the books, the fireplace, the ceiling, even the window, till the only things he could see distinctly were flaming circles, whirling and flaring in the darkness like demoniacal fireworks. It was the God of Love who was torturing him like this. And in a little while there would be nothing but this helpless, hopeless blackness; the cloud would descend and shut everything out. Only pain would stay with him, and those doubts, those questions he had never answered; those devils which would come again when he was impotent and defenceless with, 'what is the meaning of this—and this—and this?' He could not bear it. He would have to bear it as long as he lived, and what then ——? Who could tell? It might be still this darkness.

'My happiness, where is it now? My hope, who shall find it?

They shall go down to the bars of the pit, where our rest together is in the dust."

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CHAPTER III

'I SUPPOSE that your father *is pleased*,' said Mrs Marchant. 'It is always so difficult to tell."

'Let us hope the brilliant daughter will atone for the failure of a son,' returned Hilary Marchant moodily. He was standing with his back to the fireplace while he waited for the maids to bring in the breakfast, for which he was as usual an hour or so behind the time. His mother, already in the full swing of her morning's work at her writing-table, had paused in her accounts to talk to him, and now looked out across the close as the Dean's figure disappeared in the direction of the cathedral.

'You are not going to morning prayer this morning, mother?'

'No; I have so much to do. *Orare est Labore* with me, Hilary. I often think of that clever sentence of yours in your sensible essay

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on work. I keep it in my drawer still. This news about Katharine has quite hindered me, too.'

Hilary helped himself to fish at the table. 'She is lucky,' he exclaimed; 'everything she touches is a success.'

'Quite so. As you say, there is a great deal of luck in it,' returned his mother. 'We cannot at all judge correctly of people by their successes in this line. Look at poor Mr Watt. He did everything that could be done in every subject, yet a more unsatisfactory person from a *practical* point of view could not be found anywhere. But I suppose Katharine will make quite a sensation.'

'Oh, yes. When a woman does anything of this sort it is of course a great occasion for fuss. What is among men a mere "matter of course"—rather spitefully Hilary put his finger on a weak point—'drives the women hysterical with exultation.'

He picked up a letter which was lying open upon the table. 'Fourth in the classical honours list, by Jove!'

'When does she say she will be back, my dear?' asked his mother.

He glanced through the four sheets covered

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with schoolgirlish handwriting, which looked as if it had run from the tip of the writer's pen with the speed of happy speech.

'Thursday—or is it Tuesday? She has never learned to write distinctly, that's certain. She can't beat you at that, mother, at any rate.'

Mrs Marchant prided herself upon her own clear handwriting, and was not displeased at the little compliment. 'I hope you are making a good breakfast, my dear,' she said. 'Dear me, there is always something cropping up! I shall have to get her room ready. And clothes —she must have some clothes. I can't have her going about in those sloppy things she wears at Nuneham.'

'I wonder if she has toned down a bit, or if she is as excitable and schoolgirlish as ever.'

'Dear girl! I can forgive her that if she will settle quietly down. She ought to be at home. Her proper place is with us. I believe her father's eyes have been troubling him lately. Katharine is just the person who ought to spare them.'

'I don't expect he will consider her capable. You see she has never taken up Sanscrit.'

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'Then I think it would have been more to her credit if she had done so. Really I am not sure that I approve of all this study for young women. With men it is different; it is of use in their professions. But I don't suppose Katharine will marry a bit the better for it.'

'It has to be seen whether she will marry at all. Marriage is a sort of consolation prize left to the inferior order.'

'Oh, I hope not, my dear Hilary,' returned his mother earnestly 'She is really very nice looking. After all,' she continued, reopening her account-book, 'I am very glad she should have done so well after the expense in money and time.'

Hilary pushed his plate away from him. 'Curious that Katharine should have all the *physique*. A little of the latter might have been apportioned to me. There's a sort of unfairness in it.'

'I am afraid you are not making a good breakfast, Hilary,' said Mrs Marchant, who had not been following these remarks very carefully; 'I should be obliged if you would hand me the letter. I must make myself clear about the date. Thursday—to me it is undoubtedly

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Thursday; and, by the by, that is the very day on which I expect the bishop. I could almost wish it had been some other time. Now I come to think of it, I believe Mr Ambrose told me that he had written an article against higher education for women—or was it in favour of it?—I really can't remember. At any rate, Katharine is sure to be unlike any young woman he has ever met before, and a complete surprise to him. I do hope she won't say everything that comes into her head as she usually does. Really I am inclined to think that one of the worst features of these new ideas is the want of consideration they show to age. I believe it was a princess who, in her extreme youth, wrote that the world was made for her, or something to that effect, and afterwards repented of it on her death-bed—not that Katherine will ever repent of anything. Let me see—six and seven are thirteen and eight are twenty-one——'

Marchant rose from his scarcely-tasted breakfast, strolled to the mantelpiece, and looked at his reflection in the glass for some moments. He was pale, even haggard. It was impossible not to compare his appearance

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with that of his sister, who was, as a rule, radiant with health. It was strange that the difference should be so marked between them even from childhood, when he had often been sick and ailing and she had possessed a constant stream of vitality. Nature was unjust, freakish, rather cruel. There seemed to be no reason for the fact that of two children, born within two short years of each other, and under much the same hopeful circumstances, there should be this great gulf fixed in temperament and physique. Was it perhaps one of those unfathomable mysteries of heredity, which baffled the wisest men? Well, he supposed so. Yet there would have been a mournful satisfaction in the discovery of the causes which dowered the one with all the joy of life, equipped her with full golden armour to fight the battle of life, and sent the other like an unarmed warrior to the unequal combat. Puzzling this same problem, he left the breakfast-room, where his mother was now fully absorbed in her correspondence, and sought his own little room up stairs He must work. Novels, cigarettes, and cushioned chairs were seductions to be con-

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scientiously resisted. He seated himself before his writing-table, found pencil and notebook in a drawer, and opened a thick black volume on jurisprudence, in which a marker had been carefully placed. But the question which concerned him so intimately was of far deeper interest than the mere technicalities of the law, and in a brooding fit he let his restless fingers stray among the leaves. The sun fell upon the white paper with a glare that hurt his eyes, and he rose to pull down the blind. What glorious sunshine! Yet the sunshine itself is hateful when one cannot enjoy it—a mere taunting reminder of pleasures one is powerless to taste. How delightful it would be this golden morning anywhere on earth but in this conventual close, this prison of dull respectability, where people lived like limpets on a rock for all the joy or interest they got out of life—limpets on a rock, clinging hard to dull existence, far, far out of reach of any vivifying wash of the sea. With an impatient movement, he turned once more to his book, and with a mighty effort fixed his attention on some random lines. Thoughts swarmed between him and the print thick as pestilent insects. How was he ever to get free

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from the place? The hard wall of work sur rounded him; prosaic, difficult work, leading by painful steps from one examination to another. If he had only his sister's equable constitution and her enviable power to do exactly what she wished to do at will, instead of this fitful energy which came in restless spurts. What was it made concentration so difficult? Again a question of *physique*—everything comes back to that. He strolled to the window—this time deliberately. A quarter to eleven—only that! If some fiend would but bewitch these drowsy chimes, and send the clock hands round in half the time, what a flutter there would be among the good folks in the close—what a disturbance in the leisurely order of their lives! The very houses slept. Here even the golden sunshine fell under the enchantment, and shared in the nature of the things it lighted on. It was a mistake to suppose that sunlight enlivened drowsy places any more than it gladdened desolate ones. On the walls of that dilapidated farm in the valley, for instance, it would beat with a pitiless exposure.

It would be an experience to see the place again, quite worth a walk. It was now exactly

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three months since he had discovered it, and during the whole time he had steadily resisted the temptation to recover a lost match-box. That girl! He could see her still; she had the kind of face that haunts one. Seizing a pen, he began to draw the outline of her profile on some pieces of paper that lay close at hand. Did he deserve to feel proud of his long-resisted temptation to re-visit the place, or was he a mere coward after all? To keep on the safe side of things might be virtuous, but it was deadly dull. The girl, too, ought really to have some notice taken of her. How grateful she had been for the slightest sign of kindness! How prettily shy and bold by turns! He remembered how there had been some difficulty in the unfastening of his cape—the hook, perhaps, had bent a little. At any rate, it had been necessary for him to make some more or less clumsy attempts to unfasten it. With his fingers close against her warm neck he had come perilously near a kiss; who knows, indeed, what might not have happened if a man's footsteps had not made themselves heard in the yard? With a sudden wrench she had freed herself, and leaving his property behind

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her, had slipped through the out-house door to vanish with almost incredible swiftness among the pools. Her sudden disappearance had been the fitting climax to an episode which was completely finished and done with. It was, after all, perhaps, pleasanter to think of her in the romantic light of that March afternoon than to risk the disillusion further acquaintance might bring with it.

About ten days later Katharine Marchant returned from Cambridge in the happy spirits of a school-girl who comes home from the holidays. The glorious June sunlight, the strong wind from the sea, exhilarated her already joyous spirits still further, and the bright world seemed to offer itself as a symbol for her imagination to play with, lying before her like a great vari-coloured ball which a mere touch might set rolling in the direction she pleased. Allington itself had never seemed more desirable a place of residence. She was in the mood to remember only the happy associations which clung about the walls of the old grey buildings that had surrounded her from her earliest childhood. The meanest chimney-pot against the sky seemed to ac-

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quire an artistic value; friendly faces greeted her as the carriage made its slow progress through the steep streets, and in the close itself, the same ineradicable daisies she had once loved to pick, peered with saucy elfin faces through the grass.

Within the deanery itself there was an unwonted stir and bustle in preparation for the Bishop's visit. This was indeed one of the rare occasions in the year in which the quiet order of everyday life was visited with some slight interruption, and the well-oiled machinery, which went so smoothly out of sight, worked at double speed, allowing some of its vibrations to be felt in quarters where its existence was usually least perceptible. The unalterable fiat that decreed that the very sanctum of the Dean himself should not be left unmolested, sent its owner into the garden to meditate on the vanity of earthly things. Katharine found him there upon the terrace, looking older and more worn than when she had last seen him. Her mother could spare only a few minutes from her domestic anxieties to express her hopes that she had not been studying too hard, and to descant on a particular trial of

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her own, due to a failure in her machinery. One of the maids had inconsiderately fallen ill, and, in defiance of her most cherished principles, she had been obliged to send the round of the registry offices for the first help that came to hand. Katharine felt that she would have done the right thing by throwing herself into the breach, but the quiet of her own little rooms invited her to the rare luxury of a long day-dream, and the leisurely choice of a dress for the evening. At four o'clock she made some tea, and invited the Dean to partake of it with her. He accepted the innovation as a part of the day's regrettable disorder, and allowed himself to be conducted up the stairs with an audible sigh. To his daughter's disappointment the little meal did not draw them closer together, or establish any nearer footing between them. She had loved him as long as ever she could remember, at a distance always, and as a lesser creature. Since she had worked at all hard, it had been one of her girl's dreams to make herself more fit to be his companion, on common ground with him. It now remained to be seen whether he would recognise her as such, or whether they would remain unsatisfied

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strangers, unable to find the key to each other's hearts and sympathies, with the impassable barrier of different age and sex between them. With a fine knowledge of her taste for beautiful things, he had ordered a new hanging for her, which had been exactly copied from one he had heard her admire, and now hung over the doorway between the two rooms. As she thanked him for it, regarding it from different points of view, she stole furtive glances at his careworn face, and asked herself if he had not some secret trouble. Turning suddenly, he met one of those questioning looks with dismay. How much would she guess before the time came when it was inevitable that all the world should be acquainted with the fact of his humiliating affliction. For the moment her very youth and health jarred upon him. What could she understand of his many disappointments? She must by the nature of things judge him more or less hardly, despising him for his too frequent failures. On one point of course, she would be ready enough with her sympathy, but the price of it was too dear. It meant the painful uncovering of his wound, which all his skill would scarcely

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contrive to hide from those keen and penetrating eyes of hers. He could almost have wished that she had not returned.

At the solemn dinner which took place that evening, Katharine divided honours with the Bishop of the diocese, and found herself the chief object of interest to the assembled guests. Mrs Marchant felt with pride and satisfaction that her daughter was 'a great success,' and was relieved to see that the Bishop evidently liked her, and either did not entertain any very severe antipathy to the higher education of women, or was prompted by his natural gallantry to waive them in the case of an attractive young lady. Under these circumstances it would not have distressed her to know that a certain section of her guests, with more rigid principles, were not to be disarmed of their disapproval by the mere sight of a pretty woman. As it was, the Reverend Manders whispered to the Reverend Gilliard Smith his painful conviction that 'these Nunehams and Girtons' were the nursing places of agnosticism and infidelity, while Miss Carter, who was reported to be 'very clever,' had read Locke on the 'Human Understanding' at a pheno-

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menally early age, and possessed enough acquaintance with the works of Immanuel Kant to alarm the ordinary curate, looked at her with disapproval, declared to her dull little coterie that it was quite possible to be clever and 'all that' without asserting oneself; and declaimed against the impropriety of arguing with a bishop.

Knowing nothing of these things, the sunshine of Mrs Marchant's smile beamed alike upon the just and the unjust. Both her children were a source of pleasure to her, and she was gratified to see that Hilary was evidently taking pains to make himself agreeable to the desirable Katie Henderson. When, however, that young lady acceded to a request for some music, she was annoyed to find that he had disappeared, leaving the field to a gallant but nervous curate, whose anxiety to turn the pages of the fair singer's music at the crucial moment, frequently betrayed him into error. Hilary, however, was at no very great distance. Conscious of a longing for fresh air and quiet, he had strolled to the further end of the long drawing-room, where the guests were thinly scattered, passed through the heavy curtains

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which divided the recess of the window from the main body of the room, and ensconced himself behind them. A low, luxurious chair, the cooler atmosphere, and the semi-darkness, offered him reward for his gallant efforts at making himself agreeable to dull and heavy people in the warm, brightly lighted room. The buzz of voices, only subdued to lower tones during the music, was here softened by distance. Sharp opinionated tones and irritating drawl became alike one uniform murmur. He likened his place of refuge to a pleasant island on the verge of the sea.

The French windows leading on to the terrace were still open. In the corner, just a pace or two out of line with them, he was sufficiently shielded from the night air to get the benefit of its freshness without being chilled. Above the dark line of the balustrade the rosy glow of a mid-summer sunset still lingered. The light breeze brought with it the scent of lilies from the garden below, stirred the silken curtains which hung close against the glass, but was too faint to move the heavy eastern draperies beyond. These, closely drawn near the ceiling, parted a few feet above the floor,

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allowing some of the candle-light to fall through them in a narrow patch, which left the corners unillumined. The music from within was not without its soothing effect upon the nerves, and congratulating himself that he had resisted the temptation to take coffee after dinner, Marchant encouraged a dreamy half-dose, in which his consciousness of sensation from the girl's song beyond was not lost, but rather delicately enhanced. At the same time his veiled senses did not catch a slight movement on the terrace, just outside the window, and he knew nothing of a figure which bent timidly down to peer between the parted draperies into the room beyond.

The drowsy half-dream, soothed by sensuous music, could not, however, last for ever. Music soothes, and then it maddens. The plaintive love song changed to a triumphant strain, and Hilary started wide awake. That face! was he dreaming still? It was there! outside the window, turned to the faint, artificial light. For one moment he saw it distinctly,—the next it was gone, and unmistakable footsteps fell upon the terrace. Instinctively starting to his feet he swung himself through the French

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window into the open air. A flying shape flitted away into the midsummer darkness on his right, and still, as in a dream, he followed in unhesitating, eager pursuit, down the steps, down the garden path, where the downward inclination gave his feet wings. Past the garden lawn, where the tall lilies fringed the garden beds, the steeper slope seemed to carry him swiftly on without effort of his own. Close against the low wall, which divided the deanery grounds from the river bank, he came up with a panting, aproned figure. Seizing two slight wrists in his strong hands, he turned it quickly round.

'By Jove,' he said, under his breath, 'the girl from the farm!'

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CHAPTER IV.

THE deanery garden was a sunny southern slope running half way down the bank of the river, divided into about equal parts for flowers and vegetables by a broad stone wall, the remains of ancient fortifications, rich in moss and golden lichen, stone-crop, and snap-dragon. At either end of it were rustic wooden seats, half embowered in honeysuckle and clematis, reached from the flower garden by two or three steps, where the slope of the lawn had been rendered less abrupt by artificial means than the original slope, followed by the kitchen garden, which started on the other side of the wall, quite six feet lower.

One morning, shortly after her return, Katharine seated herself in one of these arbors with a fluffy Persian kitten for company, and meditated on many and weighty matters.

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By and by the kitten, who had been enjoying the deepest repose, woke with a mew at a flying leap through the air, and finding herself still in a cosy nestling place, went off to sleep again. Tired of the seat upon the wall, Katharine had jumped the five feet into the kitchen garden, and now made a voyage of discovery among rows of peas and beans, lettuce, cabbage, and asparagus beds. As she went slowly down the slope she looked back from time to time at the Cathedral towers, which rose above her sheer with the face of the cliff. She went to speak to the old gardener she had known as a child, who pointed out to her a hammock which he had "fettled up" for her between two apple-trees. To lie and swing in it for half an hour was the height of bliss. With the help of a stout stick, used as a sort of oar, she rocked herself to and fro; sometimes catching a glimpse of the river far beneath her, sometimes content to stare up at the blue above the apple branches and their pale fruit. She thought of her father. Further observation of him had convinced her that he was worried—had some secret trouble. 'Something must be done,' she said. She awoke the

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somnolent kitten, and set it up in front of her. Resigned to her fate, the kitten slept again on its hind legs. Katherine let it tumble into a ball, and rose from the hammock, leaving it in undisturbed possession.

Five minutes later the Dean, who was preparing his sermon for the next day, writing and resting by turns, was surprised by a knock at his door. Katharine entered the sombre library with the glow of the garden on her face. She wore a dress of the colour of the blue Anchusa, which the bees love. She was so fair to look at that he forgot to be annoyed by the interruption, and was only glad that he could still see her.

'Are you very busy, father; shall I disturb you?'

'No, my dear;' he pushed away his papers from him, though in reality he had only reached the second head of his sermon. 'I am glad to see you.'

It seemed as if she brought sunshine into the dull room as she moved from corner to corner. Yet he watched her not without embarrassment. He knew little of women and less of girls. Katharine was not an ordinary

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girl. He tried to realise to himself that she must necessarily have many of the thoughts and interests of his own youth, and was not like most young ladies, entirely given up to considerations of dress, needlework, and charity. Yet it was not to be supposed that there could be much common ground between them.

'I have been a tour all round the house, you know, and so I was obliged to pay a visit to the dear old library. It's just the same as ever. I am glad nothing is altered. Nice old books!' she drew her hand caressingly along the backs of some of them. 'Every one in its old place. Now I wonder —— father, I am going to see if they *are* all in their old positions.' She went carefully along the shelves, looking at him from time to time. 'I can't find fault as yet. What's this, though! Archbishop Trench on Miracles is in among the histories. I see you've mistaken it for the Short History of the Popes. The bindings are very much alike.' 'Then his sight *must* be bad,' she whispered to herself.

Her father watched her move up and down the long rows of volumes. 'I don't think you'll find many others out of place,' he remarked.

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'No, I am afraid there's not much more to find fault with,' she answered merrily, coming to the end of her inspection. 'That was the only book I could quarrel with, I believe.'

'I should never have expected you to remember, my dear.'

'No? But you see I have had plenty of practice. When I was quite little I used to love to come in here and read when you were out. At house-cleanings I used to coax the maids to let me put the books back, because I knew where each one ought to go. They thought me a prodigy.' She moved to the mantelpiece. 'The same pictures — yes — exactly the same pictures. Nothing altered. Do you know the only thing you want?"

'What is that?'

'Some flowers. I shall keep you in fresh flowers.' She came across the room and put her hand upon his shoulder. 'I am very curious. I want to know everything. Do you know I should like to rummage in all those little pigeon-holes, and find out all your secrets. What are all those papers? Manuscripts?'

'Merely business papers, bills, receipts, letters.'

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'Oh, that's very uninteresting. Now, I know what I wanted to ask; talking of manuscripts put it into my head. What about the great work? Is it nearly finished?'

'I have not been working at it lately.'

'Then it *is* finished. Father, why did you not tell me?'

'No, my dear, it is not finished.'

'Not! Then I suppose you are taking a sort of holiday?'

He did not answer. Ske knelt down at his side, and took his hand. 'Tell me, when are you going on with it?'

'Katherine, Keble somewhere speaks ——' he stopped, wondering how far she would understand him; how much he should confide in her.

'Keble, oh yes!' she exclaimed, without any reverence for the eminent tractarian. 'He was the man who said nobody would be good except for fear of hell. What does he speak of, father?'

'He speaks, Katharine, of "the lust of finishing." It is good discipline, he says, tc wean one's self from the intense desire to complete what we have undertaken. Good to sacrifice that intense desire—that almost pas-

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sionate lust—lest it come between ourselves and God. Sometimes, at pain to ourselves, the thing must be left undone. We must forswear the pleasure we promised ourselves.'

'Stop! Stop! Father, what a dreadful superstition! You can't mean that it can ever be good to labour and toil for nothing—to reap no benefit for years of work—to give nothing after all to the world.'

'My child, reason is powerless to judge. It may be that I made it a sort of idolatry, and therefore I am called upon to make th sacrifice.'

Katharine rose to her feet. 'Father, it is simply this. You believe because you have set your heart on something, therefore it is a sin to try and get it.'

'Katharine, I dare not reason; only pray that I may know His will.'

She stood at the window flipping the blind cord against her fingers. There was no other sound in the room but the slight noise she thus made. He almost wished she would go. She would never understand; never sympathise with him in a position more or less a false and weak one.

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'I do not believe in your God,' she said.

'Hush, Katharine, hush!'

'It is a mere fetish—a dangerous mischief-making fetish—that puts its finger on the thing that made your life worth living, and tells you to give it up. It is the product of your own imagination. Do not let it paralyse you any longer.'

Must he tell her the whole miserable and humiliating truth. Sooner or later it would have to be common knowledge.

'You don't—can't really believe in it.' He doubted even as she spoke. 'Think, father, if Dante, if à Kempis' (she named his favourite authors) 'had believed as you do, forsworn this wicked lust of finishing, how much poorer the world would have been. Better not be perfect at such a cost.' She came across the room and knelt at his side. 'As to its being good for you or any one else that you should make fruitless the toil of so many years—you don't believe it.'

He did not speak; he might have been unaware of her presence. The doubts he had lulled for the moment were once again set in motion. The tempter was assailing him in a new guise

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'The work was to be a very useful work father—was it not?'

'Yes; one for which there is distinct demand.' He made the first step towards siding with his adversary.

'And you are the only person who has the necessary knowledge?'

How could she guess that? He turned and looked at her. 'Yes, I suppose I am perhaps the only one who has investigated so far along this particular line.'

'And you have it all at your fingers' ends!' She looked up at him with eyes full of eagerness. The devil that tempted St Antony in the form of a woman was not so beautiful.

'More, I have it arranged in copious notes that only want re-arranging and re-writing.'

'Splendid! And now, father, it has to be done.'

'Not if the command has come to me to give it up.'

'You mean—you actually think it right that all this time, all your labour of years, should be wasted.'

He repeated her word. 'Wasted. Yes, I am afraid it must be.'

'But it can't be; it must not.'

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'A stronger Power than you or I has ordained it.'

'Do not believe it, father. You have laboured and toiled for years, and now you are within sight of the goal. It means so much to you. Your work ——'

He bent his head, remembering hours of enforced idleness, of maddening doubt and depression—'was my salvation,' he said.

'And it shall be still.' She held his cold hands, and looked up into his face. She drew a long breath, looking into his eyes. 'Ah, I think I know. You have been over-working. Your eyes have been troubling you.'

He hardly knew whether to be dismayed or relieved.

'Yes, for some time past they have.'

'And that has worried and depressed you. That has given you these sick thoughts. Have you consulted Dr Vachell, father?'

'No; there is no need. I do not wish any fuss.'

She thought it best not to press the point any further for the present. 'Well, father, the first course is very obvious. You must rest—completely—neither read nor write a line.'

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'There, you see, Katharine, whether we desire it or not, my work comes to a complete standstill.'

'Does it?' She still caressed his hands in hers. 'That is just what it must not do. I am going to be your eyes, and read and write for you.'

The touch of her soft, firm hands seemed to warm his whole body. It was possible for those of his own flesh and blood to be strangers to him. But this child of his was bound to him by something more than the mere physical tie. A miracle had happened; the affection he had desired, for which he had never dared to hope, was here poured out before him. How beautiful, how noble, how truly good she was. Of old, he had possessed a very gentle and lovely sister, who had died early. With the security of the dead, she had lived for him ever since in the shrine of the ideal Madonna-woman, in a peace that is always perfect, a tranquillity never marred by contact with the ugly and sordid world. It seemed to him almost as if this ideal had come to life again in this his own daughter.

'My child,' he said, 'you are very good.'

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'Why, father, I am only going to do just what I like for my own amusement.'

'Amusement, my dear! I fear you do not realise what a very arduous task it is you wish to undertake.'

'Yes; but I love hard work, and it is always so much nicer to work two together than by one's self. You shall dictate to me as hard as ever you like. When shall we begin?'

He shook his head with a half sigh. Her soft hair nestled against his coat. He stroked it tenderly. 'It is like your aunt Laura's,' he said.

'But you haven't answered my question. When are we going to begin?'

He thought less of the will of God than of those arguments of her's he had formerly attributed to the devil. Her voice was the voice of reason. Reason and Faith are often opposed. Nevertheless, if it were possible to complete the task he had set himself, it must be surely right to do it. Certainly her scheme was not an impossible one. She would make an intelligent coadjutor. Yet it was difficult to come to a decision. He wavered.

'Well, father?'

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'I do not think there could be any harm in our trying. Wait a little, Katharine, I must think it over.'

The first bell for luncheon had rung some minutes; it was very near the hour.

'You will say yes,' she said.

As she washed her hands, she whispered to herself that the victory was half won, and in another minute appeared punctually at lunch.

The meal over, she persuaded him to go into the garden with her, and they made a visit to the small hot-house, where grapes were ripening. On her way up the slope, she picked a handful of flowers for his study, and when they re-entered the house, adorned his table and mantelpiece. Gay nasturtiums gleamed in sombre corners in a way that delighted her.

'To get a good effect, there is nothing like keeping to one flower,' she said. She surveyed her handiwork, her head critically on one side. Then she carefully closed the door. 'And now to business. Is it this cupboard, father? Are the manuscripts here?'

'My dear, I never said—however, you must have your way.' He came across the room to where she knelt by the glass door. 'Here is

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the key. It is the right-hand corner, and the bottom shelf.'

'I have them.' She carried the pile to the table, and without further preamble, he began to explain to her the plan of the work, and to show her how much was already written in final fair copy. He was astonished at the marvellous quickness with which she grasped his ideas and made pertinent suggestions. In half-an-hour he was able to dictate to her the beginning of the fourth chapter; then she copied some pages of notes into their place, consulting him as to verbal alteration, so that the whole should be practically re-written by him without his reading a single line or putting pen to paper. After some little while, they fell into the swing of work together, and began to make sure and rapid progress, climbing the height with equal and unwearied ease, where alone he had stumbled feebly and painfully. One—two hours passed unnoticed. The bell began to ring for evensong. Katharine came to a full stop, and fluttered the leaves she had covered in triumph.

'We have made progress, father. Is it not splendid?'

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'We have indeed. At this rate, Katharine, we shall reach the goal before ever I thought it possible.'

A miracle had happened. He gloated over the neatly-written pages as though they were so much precious treasure. Together they put away what was already complete into a special drawer, returning the notes to their shelf in the cupboard. For the future they planned to write together in the mornings. Katharine watched her father cross the close on his way to the Cathedral with an elastic, hopeful step, unlike his gait of yesterday. Her heart glowed with a sort of maternal pleasure at the change.

That evening was a very cheerful one in the domestic annals of Allington Deanery. The sound of the piano lured the Dean into the drawing-room, whither Hilary followed him. For once, to Mrs Marchant's satisfaction, the family circle was complete. She knitted very contentedly, glad that in the pursuit of more abstruse studies her daughter had not wholly given up those accomplishments which render home attractive. A still greater pleasure was in store for her when, for the first time for many years, her husband asked her to play

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chess—a game in which she loved to exert her skill, and felt herself proficient.

They played one or two interesting battles, till it was past the usual hour for bed-time; and after exciting manœuvres, she won for the second time. She felt pleased with herself and all the world, and when they went up stairs followed Katherine to her rooms.

'My dear,' she said, with maternal solicitude, 'I do hope you are comfortable. If you had not expressed a wish to the contrary, I should have had it all done up with a new paper and a carpet. Not that I suppose my taste would have pleased you. You must tell me if you want anything.'

'I will, mamma. You know I don't like much furniture.'

Mrs Marchant surveyed the plainly-coloured walls and polished floor.

'I suppose it is æsthetic,' she said, 'but to me it looks bare.'

'I think them lovely, mamma; they remind me of my college rooms.'

'Well, dear, for my part *I* should like a few alterations. The picture-hanging is so very unsymmetrical. I should so like to give you

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"Death, the Enemy" for that wall. You know I bought it for the corresponding one in my room.'

'But what would you do without it?'

'I should get a Doré, dear,' said her mother seriously. She could not understand why Katharine should laugh. 'I hope you like your new dresses. I had them in readiness because I expected you would be in want of some. I was sorry to have them made with loose fronts; but you know,' she continued, with a slight touch of reproach in her voice, 'one can never tell how many inches you are round the waist. However,' she went on, more cheerfully, 'I chiefly wanted to speak to you about your father. You have done him good already, Katharine. He has come out of his shell wonderfully. He looks *so* much better; I do hope the improvement will continue. It vexes me to see him look ill and depressed, and I only wish he had the sort of interests that I have.'

Katharine waited patiently till her mother bade her an affectionate good-night, retired to her room, and locked the door. She then ran softly down stairs into the library, where her

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father sat quietly resting with a new air of contentment. He rose at her entrance, very pleased to see her. This was his girl—now no stranger; beautiful and clever among women —his companion and coadjutor. For the first time he embraced her without constraint and embarrassment.

'Are you very sorry I have come home to tease you?' she asked lightly.

'My dear Katharine,' he expostulated. It was difficult for him to take anything without seriousness.

'But, father, why were we not friends before; why did you not tell me your worry?'

'My dear, I never thought you could have any possible interest in my affairs.'

'That was your mistake. Now we must not have any secrets; and to-morrow we go on with our work.'

For the first time for months, on his side, there was something to look cheerfully forward to. They separated happily for the night.

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CHAPTER V

It was a still, hot night in August. The French windows of the great drawing-room were set wide open, and not a breath stirred the light silken curtains, undrawn to admit freely what air there was. Katharine, in the loosest and coolest of gowns, sat facing the dusky garden in a low chair, with a book upon her knee. The book was a scientific one, which demanded her best attention; yet, do what she would, she found concentration difficult, and at last gave up the attempt to read, ascribing her unusual restlessness to atmospheric conditions, which meant a thunderstorm later on.

The room was spacious and lofty, with a scheme of colouring at once rich and sombre, and contained artistic treasures of all kinds brought from abroad. Under an antique silver lamp, of which several were hanging from the ceiling, the Dean and Mrs Marchant were

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finishing one of those games of chess which they now played almost habitually. Neither of the elder people appeared to feel the heat, though they were wearing black silk and broad-cloth instead of muslin. The game was a stale-mate. Katharine put down her book and stepped out to the terrace. She paced on to the end and then back again. As she passed the windows she could see the Dean fingering the chess-men, while Mrs Marchant resumed her knitting. His face had lost the weary expression it had worn on her first coming. Only to-day Dr Vachell had remarked to her that he looked ten years younger.

Having finished his task, he leant contentedly back in his chair, resting with shut eyes. The night was hot, but did not seem to him oppressive. Never could he remember a summer to equal this one. Long days of perfect sunshine and blue skies had succeeded each other without break. To tell the truth, his daughter's power of keen enjoyment, her intense exuberant pleasure in natural things had touched sensuous fibres in his own nature, for many years dormant and in abeyance, and with his failing sight he had thus come to see and

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appreciate much that he had passed by unnoticed when his faculties had been keen and perfect. With love, companionship, congenial occupation made easy to him, and more exercise in the open air than he had been wont to take, his health perceptibly improved. He tasted happiness and content under the new order of things, as if it were always to continue. A week ago Mrs Marchant had spoken ominously of 'a change.' Had there been only herself to think about, she would have liked to have accepted an invitation to stay with some friends on the east coast; but, as it was, she thought they should all seek bracing air together.

Katharine, however, had declared that she wished to continue steadily with the work, and her father was secretly delighted that her inclinations should tally with his own. On learning their decision, Mrs Marchant had accepted her friend's invitation, with the happy consciousness of having been ready to make a sacrifice on the family altar, which only their own predilections had prevented them from accepting. On the whole, she was inclined to applaud their zeal in finishing a work

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which, it seemed to her, had been quite long enough in hand, when one considered that its circulation would be chiefly among professors of dead languages. She had packed up very cheerfully, and to-night was disposed to smile upon all the world.

Katharine figured largely in her plans for the future as she mentally sketched out plans of campaign for the winter. To every one is their appointed work. Without knowing exactly why, she felt sure that it would be useless to ask her to teach in the Sunday School or be a district visitor People without a college education could do those things. Katharine's rarer powers must be brought into play in other directions.

'I hope,' she said to her husband, 'that on my return you will not monopolise too much of Katharine's time—not, of course, that I in the least grudge her to *you*; but I do think that it will be to her own advantage to interest herself in some other tasks. Now, there is so much secular work, I am sure we shall be able to find something to interest her. There is the Boys' Club. I believe it is quite the fashion now to teach wood-carving and model-

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ling at evening classes. She might do that. I daresay it is interesting, though I can't quite see what good it is to the lower orders.'

'Katharine must do what she likes,' said the Dean. He had already secretly planned a new work, to be begun when the sheets of the other were passing through the press.

'Of course,' returned his wife. 'I am so glad she is settling down so nicely. She seems entirely to have outgrown all her old foolish ideas, and to have become quite sensible. I must say at one time I despaired of her. I see now that I should have been more trustful. I suppose, at the rate you are now proceeding, your book will soon be finished.'

'Not till Christmas. At present we are at a standstill till I have looked at some manuscripts in the Museum.'

Mrs Marchant tidied her work-basket contentedly. Katharine, she felt, was becoming all that she could wish—more than she had ever dared to hope. Hilary—her first-born and dearest—appeared to be in good health and spirits, and was working hard and steadily.

Katharine paced the terrace backwards and forwards, and in spite of the oppressive heat,

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went fast, with the long, swinging strides of the woman whom healthy athleticism has taught to discard unnecessary draperies. She had played tennis for two hours—yet all her limbs were restless. How quiet, how very calm they were in the big drawing-room! Her mother, in rich silks and creamy lace, looked the personification of the complacent peace and dignity of handsome age. Her father, still pondering with knitted brows over the chess-board, might have been taken as a type of that mild, non-militant conservatism which pursues the even tenor of its way, content to ignore all the strife and war of parties and of classes with which society goes upon its way. And without this enclosed garden of silence and of calm—even half a mile away, in the dirty, struggling town yonder—problems of more pressing import than could be worked out upon a chess-board were crying for solution. The world had given Katherine much; she owed much to the world—a debt not to be cancelled by collaboration in works upon philology or the greatest proficiency in the arts of dress and tennis. She climbed the steps to the seat upon the ancient wall and looked towards the town.

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About these twinkling gas-lights in the ugly slums swarmed another order of human life than that inhabiting the close—sordid, vulgar, rough, and grimy, yet with a go and vigour about it lacking to this polite, refined, and exclusive set of persons upon the hill-top. Katharine was too much part and parcel of the larger and rougher world ever to stand outside it—to offer salvation to its soul, or give it doles of coals and blankets. Some day, at no far distant time, she too would find her work among the currents of its newest life. The lights began to go out in-doors. She returned to the drawing-room, where her father swept the chess-men from the board. He looked up as she entered. It might be only a trick of his failing sight, but in her white dress, with her loosened hair, she appeared to him pale. A sudden pang smote him. Was he guarding with sufficient care this precious treasure of his? Could it be that he was taking too much from her by accepting her will to work these hot days? He moved a step towards her.

'My love,' he said, 'are you quite sure that you are perfectly well?'

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She smiled. 'Gloriously—splendidly well,' she said.

'I do hope,' he continued, 'I am not wrong in not sending you away for a change.'

'Of course, father'—she put her hand on his coat—'I would take a change if I felt I needed it; but I don't.'

'Then you are quite sure you are satisfied at staying on here?'

'Perfectly satisfied.' They crossed into the hall together. 'You see,' she said, 'I may take a holiday later on in the autumn before I begin my own work.'

'Your own work, Katharine!' He crossed to the opposite wall and set the barometer with a hand that trembled slightly. 'What work?'

'Well, naturally, I have settled nothing definitely; but I have not given up my old idea of joining Mary Field.'

To London—all that way from him—now, now that she had wound herself about his heart, rendering her presence indispensable to him. He could not trust himself to speak, but with an effort controlled his emotion under his usual calm.

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'We will talk about this to-morrow,' he said, and they parted for the night in their usual manner.

Of the three, only Mrs Marchant, whose nerves were untroubled by atmospheric conditions, slept soundly. Katharine felt it would be useless to undress till the storm broke the oppressive stillness, and brought the relief of breathing freely, and when the house was quiet, stole softly out into the open air. She wandered through the garden, and among the mazes of the vegetable beds. Distant thunder travelled rapidly nearer. The gorge of the river was a stifling pit, fitfully illuminated now and then by sheet lightning. Seeking a refuge in the hammock, under the apple-boughs, she set herself to watch the gradual approach of the storm, letting her thoughts stray the while in those vague longings of the girl in which there is more sweetness than pain. Then her mood changed. She was filled with the excitement and elation of the awakened night. The lightning illuminated the garden with a strange splendour; the thunder travelled rapidly nearer, and broke in crash after crash overhead, and heavy raindrops pattered among

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the thick leafage of the apple-boughs, under which she lay securely sheltered. Suddenly she thought she heard the sound of voices and footsteps in the garden above. Something like a desire for human companionship prompted her to spring out of the hammock, and run quickly through the rain into the flower-garden. Half way up the path a flash more brilliant than any that had preceded it showed her a man's figure a few paces away from her, some yards from a small summer-house.

'Is that you, Hilary?' she cried, as darkness succeeded the momentary illumination.

'Katharine! You——'

She felt the rain beat through the thin material of her dress. 'To the summer-house, quick!'

'No, to the house.' He grasped her hand in a nervous way, and drew her rapidly in the direction of the terrace. Releasing herself, she ran quickly up the slope, and preceded him into the drawing-room, through the French window. Her bedroom candle furnished its only light.

'What on earth were you doing out there at

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this time of night?' he inquired, irritably, as she shook the raindrops from her hair.

'I might ask you the same question. I was watching the storm, till from the hammock I thought I heard voices, and ran up to see.'

'Voices! whose?'

'I don't know—a man and a woman's, I think.'

'I thought I heard them too. That brought me out. One of the maids required James to re-assure her, I suppose. A nice opportunity for a little love-making. Come away from the window, Katharine.'

The air without, the room itself, seemed suddenly aglow with pale flame. In the darkness that followed a crash of falling boughs and masonry mingled with the heavy thunder peal.

'An elm down!' Katherine stepped from the French window on to the terrace. Hilary clutched her by the arm, and pulled her wildly back.

'Don't go down there; stay here for Heaven's sake!'

She looked at him in surprise at his evident

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terror, and freed herself from his touch impatiently, with a vague feeling that his fear was contagious.

'What's the good of going? It's too dark to see much.'

'Yes, yes. It's too dark. Go back into the house.'

She stepped back into the shelter of the window frame, and listened as he went rapidly along the terrace, realising, vexed with herself, that his strange terror had communicated itself to her also. In her strong youth she disliked all signs of emotion, and was inclined to make light of dangers rather than to exaggerate them. In a few seconds she heard the sound of his returning footsteps. He entered the room like one who walks in his sleep, and, without noticing her as she stood in the shadow of the embrasure, marched straight to the table, and, taking the lighted candle from it, went out of the room. For a moment Katharine stood immovable in her corner. Then she groped her way through the dark, and crossed the hall guided by the light which fell through the wide open door of the dining-room. As she entered Hilary was helping himself recklessly

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to spirits. At the light rustle of her dress he turned with a start.

'You here! I thought every one was in bed?'

'Which of the elms was it? Where did it fall?'

'Just across the place where we were standing.' His hand shook as he raised the glass to his white lips.

'By the summer house?'

'No; further down the bank,——O, I forgot I was alone then!'

'Hilary, you will be ill if you take so much brandy.'

'I shall be ill without it, you mean. Good God! what a narrow escape. Another moment and we—I—must have been killed. You see now why I hurried you out of the garden. I had some prescience of what was going to happen.'

'But, after all, nothing so bad has happened. We have nothing more to be sorry for than the tree.

'Only a tree! Don't go to bed yet, Katharine. Sit down a bit.' He took the candle from the sideboard, set it on a writing table on one side of the fireplace, and seating himself in a low chair, leaned his elbows upon

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it. 'Only a tree! As I went down the bank just now, though, I had such a horrible idea. I had a feeling, that was like a dead certainty, that the lightning had crushed more than a tree. Wasn't it horrible, Katharine?'

As he bent forward, half across the table, with wild eyes compelling hers, she felt the domination of his terror-stricken mood, and could return no articulate answer.

'But that was not the worst.' He leaned over a little further towards her. 'As I went down the bank, just for a moment—only for a moment, I *wanted* it to be there *crushed, crushed, crushed* upon the ground. You don't believe me. I tell you I did. What do you say? One shouldn't talk of remote possibilities. Not so very remote. Another moment or two and I might have been struck myself. Well, if one were sure that there were nothing behind, I think I would as soon have gone under with the crash as not. But one can't be sure. Do you believe in hell?'

'My dear Hilary, do not let us have theological questions at this time of night. Of course not!'

'I daresay! It's all very well to be ad-

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vanced and agnostic like the rest, but you don't know how closely things cling to one, especially when death comes as near as this. Supposing there *is* a hell, I believe I should go to it. If my end were sudden,—well, and if one had time to prepare, is it likely God or devil would be cheated out of his due! You are all right, of course. God would let you in. He gives some temptations, and damns them for ever: others, pure and good, know nothing of feelings deep-rooted in our natures. Heredity, predestination—what are they but the same thing?'

He threw himself back into his chair, and there was silence, only broken by the sound of the storm without. Katharine, vaguely conscious of some painful mystery behind his words, told herself that now she had come face to face with life. The enchanted garden of her pleasant, easy, smiling college days was past. She had come out into the world of realities, where ugly and bitter things were no longer shut out and hidden. Well, whatever horror were there, it were better to see it in the flesh, and fight it face to face, than to brood over and fear it as an invisible, ambushed

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monster. Absorbed in her own thoughts, she did not notice a moth which fluttered about the candle, till Hilary leaned forward, and struck at it irritably with his handkerchief.

'Poor moth!' he exclaimed, with real pity for himself. 'What would you do, Katharine, if you saw a human moth flitting about a human candle?'

'I suppose I should warm it.'

'Much good that! The candle, you see, is so terribly attractive. Its danger is covered by its fascinating brightness. Katharine, do you ever visualise—no, that is hardly the word. Do you ever associate things together in an unaccountable way? Do you know that a candle flame—only the flame—always has one association for me? It actually looks like a girl—one particular sort of girl, of the gentle, meek, clinging, childish kind.'

He looked intently at the object in question.

'What a ridiculous fancy!' he exclaimed, suddenly.

Absorbed in himself and his own words, he had not noticed that Katharine had risen from her chair. 'For heaven's sake, Hilary, stop talking in riddles!'

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'Riddles! What do you mean?'

I don't know, and I don't want to know—'

'That's just it—you don't *know*; and, like all girls, you make up for want of knowledge by a lively imagination. Stop, Katharine! I beg your pardon. I am at fault for talking wildly. Don't go.'

A numb, physical misery possessed Katharine, and she hardly knew whether to go or stay. To ask for confidence, to offer help, was alike out of the question. A sudden movement on Hilary's part broke into her hesitation.

'The moth again! The brute. Catch it, Katharine. Kill it!'

'Don't hurt it, Hilary. I won't have you hurt it.'

He took no notice; but, with a strange determination in his eyes, struck it down maimed upon the table; then with a sort of savage triumph he flicked it on to the floor with his handkerchief and crushed it underfoot. 'There's the end of the moth and the candle!' he cried wildly. His tone changed. 'I couldn't stand the thing any longer, Katharine; it got on my nerves horribly.'

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Katharine had risen, and stood with one hand upon the table.

'What it is that is on your mind, Hilary, I don't know. But I do know that it is foolish of me to sit up and wear myself out with talk like this.'

'What talk? What do you mean? What have I said?'

'Don't ask me—I don't know; but if you have any worry——'

'Worry! What on earth put that into your head? What do you wish me to confide in you? I cannot be a little upset without your supposing all sorts of wild things—reading heaven knows what into my words. Good heavens! Your extravagant imagination will lead you into difficulties if you don't take care. This sort of thing always spoils a friendship between a man and a woman—even a brother and sister.'

'Perhaps I am in the wrong,' she faltered. She went to the door. 'Good night, Hilary.' She paused, hesitating, upon the threshold one moment; the next she was gone.

What on earth had he been saying? How near had he come to self-betrayal? Cursing

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himself for a fool, he waited till he heard her shut her door, and then made his way to his room, where the lightning was still visible through the unshuttered windows.

Grasping the blind, which had caught half-way, he pulled it roughly down. Even then the lightning was not totally shut out, and taking a lamp from the chimney-piece, he set a light to the wick and lit another candle, till the steady illumination drowned the lurid flashes from without. Then he drew out a number of sketches from a carved box on his table—a face—a face—a face—a face again, and thrust them into the empty grate, where he set a light to them, watching them flare up and shrivel into bits of blackened paper. There must be an end of this before worse things happened. God! When he thought of the possible results, of what *might* occur, of the stupendous and direful issues of action which was the mere drifting on an unhindered current of inclination, of the pitfalls which beset the almost inevitable path—when one thought of all that—he wiped the perspiration from his forehead. Well, there should be an end of it all—just such an end as of those bits of blackened paper in the grate.

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He awoke in the early morning, and finding that the room was close, threw open the window he had shut on the preceding night. What a night it had been! He remembered it now as an evil dream, which continues to affect the nerves only as long as one broods about it in the dark. The ghosts had gone with the daylight. It was sunrise, full of shadows and misty half-lights, and as he drew in long breaths, full of the fragrance of the damp, brown earth, and listened to the dewy tinkle among the leaves, the faint uprising and reviving of a hundred green living things, something magically made of shifting light and shade beneath the apple-boughs moved like the figure of a woman.

. . . . .

After Mrs Marchant's departure on the following morning, their work being for a moment at a standstill, Katharine seized the opportunity for taking a long walk after luncheon. In the evening her father was engaged, and in the short time they spent together neither of them broached the subject of her going away. The next day's early post brought the Dean the following epistle:—

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'DEAR CUTHBERT,—You will be glad to hear that I arrived in good time to-night, and find everything exactly to my tastes. The new house and grounds are most charmingly situated, and my host and hostess most considerate in every way. There are several other guests beside myself—all nice people, whom I am delighted to meet. Among others, I may mention Lady Sudeley and her daughter, who have been here already some time. The former is to open a bazaar in the park to-morrow, to clear off the debt for the restoration of the dear little church, which seems to have been effected in a most thorough and painstaking spirit. I have volunteered to give my services at the hardware stall. I know young people like the more ornamental part, and I am only desirous of being of use.

'Just before starting for the station yesterday, I was much upset by some remarks of Katharine's. In spite of all we thought to the contrary, she seems still to be hankering after the old ridiculous idea of earning her own living, and spoke about her own happiness in a most *selfish* manner one would never have expected from anybody with her ideas about humanity, *etcetera*.

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When I mentioned you, she said—I hope without any warrant—that she believed you would like her to do what she chose; and she was so positive and so regardless of anybody's feelings but her own in the matter, that an otherwise pleasant journey was completely spoiled. On calm reflection, however, I do not, after all, think there is much to fear. Of course, if she says anything to you of this preposterous fancy, you will not be likely to encourage her. I think the best plan will be to take *no notice*. We crush Quixotism most effectively by ignoring it, and I cannot think that *our* child will persist in a selfish and undutiful course—specially if we consistently do as I suggest.

'I trust you will not tire yourself in London, nor forget the execution of those little commissions of mine in Oxford Street. If you *could* see the secretary of the Penitents' Home Association, I should be *most* grateful.—Believe me, dear Cuthbert, your affectionate wife,

'ELLEN MARCHANT.'

'*P.S.*—Of course you will not let K. know I have written on this subject. Please give her my love. I forgot to say that on my way to

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the station I confided the whole to Hilary, who was most surprised and grieved that she should behave in such a manner.'

The Dean perused this epistle with an impatient frown, tore it up, and consigned it to his wastepaper basket. As he did so, Katharine entered the room. She had just come from ordering the carriage which was to take him to the station.

'Sit down, my dear,' he said, 'I want to speak to you. 'What was it you said the other night about going away?'

'Only, father, that I still cherish the old idea of joining Mary Field in London.'

For a full minute he did not speak. She took his silence for the disapproval her friend had foretold.

'I thought you enjoyed your work with me,' he said at last.

'So I do—immensely—for a time. But you know, father, I shan't be happy till I have *real* work of my own.'

'*Real* work of your own. Pray, Katharine, in what manner does our present work together lack reality?'

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'Well, father, it is not a work I should care to devote my whole life to, though, of course, it is very interesting from a purely intellectual point of view.'

'Go on, my dear,' said the Dean, puzzled to know what other point of view she could want.

'You see,' continued Katharine, conscious of treading on delicate ground, 'I want something with a more direct bearing on life; it seems to me rather—irrelevant.'

Irrelevant! a book for which there was a distinct demand. The Dean looked at his daughter. She had seemed to him a wonder, a paragon among women. Now he awoke to the fact that the feet of his idol were only mere feminine clay; that she was incapable of full enjoyment or appreciation of the work of a man.

There was more of her mother in her than he had supposed. It was a pity. She was too finely dowered with intellectual gifts to waste them among the illusions of practicality.

'What do you expect to do in London?' he asked.

'I shall teach—at first a great deal. Mary Field hopes to put me in the way of getting some journalistic work.'

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It was the dream of a foolish and ignorant child, who knew nothing of life, and for her own sake must be prevented.

'I am afraid, father,' she continued, 'you think me unreasonable; but I can't help having an adventurous spirit. I should like to use all my powers to the utmost. I should like to feel myself swimming with the tide.'

'I hope, Katharine, you are not bitten by the modern mania of philanthropy, with all its brand new patent nostrums for social salvation. As well seek to win the mad world from its strife as beat your hands against stones till they bleed.'

Katharine smiled, shaking her head. 'I am not going to believe that,' she said. 'Now, father, it is my turn to ask questions. How about your sight? Is it any better?'

'I am afraid not, Katharine.'

'But, dear, you told me it had not troubled you lately.'

'That is because I have not tried it. You have been eyes to me lately. When I attempt to use them, I find them no whit improved.'

'Then, father, you must not go on longer without advice. We have proved without a

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doubt mere rest is not enough. You know you promised. I hope I have not been wrong in not urging you before.'

He was silent. If he told her everything, was it possible that she would still be ready to leave him in loneliness and blindness? It could not be; and yet——. He wanted the knowledge to come to her with the fullest possible effect, and his position was a difficult one. He had deceived her—withheld the truth in a way that it was possible she might resent.

'You will go, dear,' she said.

He could not tell her he had already been, and that he had been hiding the reality from her all these months. What was he to do?

She herself provided a loophole of escape.

'It will be so easy for you to see some specialist when you are in London.'

He assented with relief, and scrupulous avoidance of a fib.

'Quite so, Katharine,' he said. 'When I return I will let you know his verdict. Sir Murray Pettigrew is, I think, an excellent person to whom to go.'

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CHAPTER VI.

ON the day of the Dean's return, Katharine sat in her room with an open letter before her, part of which ran as follows:—

'From the cheerful and contented tone which runs evenly through every line of all the pages you send me, I naturally conclude that you are by this time thoroughly restless and desirous of a change. It seems to me that you have done quite enough philologising. I have already begun to picture you as a silly maiden in an enchantment, kept in the bowels of the earth by a crew of spectacled ghouls (I beg their pardon, I mean respectable and learned professors), to prod and burrow among the remains of their buried forefathers, and bring up little bits to the light for them to peer and puzzle over. Seriously, Katharine, you have spent too much time in tombs. Come up to the light, leaving the dead to bury their dead;

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there is much real work for you to do, and all London for you to enjoy—and, believe me, there is no place in the world like it. Don't waste any more of your time, but make a start at your own proper work, and, above all, try to come up in time for Story's new play. There are many delights into which I shall have the pleasure of initiating you.'

Katharine's answer ran as follows:—

'As yet I can hardly settle anything definitely. I must finish the great work on which we are at present engaged. Not to do so would be a base desertion. The other day I mentioned something to him of my coming to you, and I am afraid he thought me unreasonable, and was grieved and disappointed at my wishing to leave home. Mamma seemed very vexed, and I am afraid will not be open to argument. She seems to have made up her mind I was to go on for ever contentedly philologising.

'Lately my father's sight has been trying him considerably, and that has been an additional reason for my staying. I have persuaded him to see an oculist—it is quite possible he merely requires new spectacles,

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and, at any rate, I shall try and get him to employ an amanuensis to spare his sight when I am gone. I will let you ——'

The door of Katharine's room was open to the gallery, and at that moment she distinctly heard the click of a latch-key in the hall below. She laid down her pen and rose in expectation.

The Dean, hanging his hat upon the rack, heard the rustle of her skirts as she descended. The sound gave him anything but unalloyed pleasure. She, by her own foolish acts and desires, had made a jarring note in the perfect harmony of their friendship. Over and over again he had told himself that it was monstrous that she should desire to leave him. Yet he dared not command her, but had been obliged to wait and calculate the moves of a game in which he was to play his last card with fullest effect. The position was a humiliating one; he must appeal to her compassion in the most effective way, till moved by sheer pity and tenderness, she would perhaps —— do what? Forswear an absolutely foolish plan to follow the right and natural course. For the last two days he had never ceased to

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torment himself with speculations as to what her final decision would be, and the fact that he could thus doubt had in itself constituted a grievance against her. It seemed impossible that she should be callous enough to leave him in his loneliness and blindness, yet the mere fact that the possibility existed was a source of bitterness to him.

Katharine was shocked at the sight of him, so deep were the lines with which anxiety had marked and aged his face, and she drew him into the library and shut the door with a deeper fear than she had yet framed.

'Are there any letters?' he asked, after all his preparation, still beset with the harassed longing to play his cards to the best advantage.

She fetched them from the box on the mantelpiece, and laid them upon the table, her hands still covering them. 'Dear,' she said, 'please tell me first what has happened —please.'

He must tell her the truth simply and boldly. 'I have had bad news, Katharine,' he answered, seating himself wearily in his chair.

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'From the oculist?' she faltered.

'From Sir Murray Pettigrew—yes.'

'What is it?' She leant forward across the corner of the table, scattering the letters on the floor with an abrupt movement.

'I am going blind, Katharine.'

He said the words almost as an actor might have done, waiting with a veiled intentness to witness their effect.

'Oh!' She altered her position, and kneeling down put her arms about him with a protecting gesture. 'But there must be some hope,' she said, 'something to be done.'

There is nothing; the decay of the nerve cannot be arrested. I have a little respite—that is all.'

'How long, my dearest?'

'Perhaps as long as nine months, but only that if I have no worry or anxiety. A shock of any kind might bring it suddenly upon me. My days of light are like the few poor coins of a miser, which any moment may see stolen from me.'

What would happen? What would she do? She did not speak—only held him still tenderly. She had not yet learned the noble

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woman's lesson of instantaneous sacrifice for those she loves.

'I dread the darkness, Katharine,' he continued, uncovering his wound with difficulty, whipt to the point only by the necessity of making his appeal to her pity as telling as it was possible to make it. 'I dread it intensely. Mental inaction is maddening to me; it is a torture worse than death.'

'We must think of some plan by which your work can be carried on. You must have ——' she stopped short, with an instinctive feeling that he would resent any suggestion as to a secretary.

Still she could not—would not—see the very obvious way out of the difficulty. He spoke with outward resignation. 'Loneliness I have borne before; loneliness I must bear again, with this added curse.'

She rose, deeply pained, bitterly sorry for him, and crossed to the window. He remembered another occasion on which she had stood there, flipping the cord impatiently with her fingers. 'O God,' he prayed, 'let her not go; let her not go; and I will bless thee even for this affliction.' Suddenly she turned. Had he

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been the most accomplished actor, he could not have chosen a more effective *pose* than the one in which he now sat, with listless hands, among the papers in front of him, and eyes staring into vacancy. Just in that manner he would sit in days to come—sightless and alone. Katharine's imagination was profoundly touched. Almost as if he had divined her thoughts, he called her—'Katharine.'

She went to him, and half sitting on the arm of his chair, put her arm round his neck.

'I,' she said, 'have given up my first plan. I shall stay with you till the great work is finished.'

Only that! Not I will stay with you always, your solace, your help as long as you need me. Only the concession of a few months. Yet it was much—much. When once she came to realise, as she must infallibly do, how much she was to him, she would grant more. He could have cried aloud with relief—the strain of past days was broken. He drew her to him and folded her in his arms, trembling with a deep, suppressed joy and relief.

'My child,' he said, with the assurance that the battle was gained, 'you must do as you

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wish. I would not keep you unless it were for your good.' He opened his arms as if to release her.

For answer she nestled closer to him. 'I will stay—till Christmas—till the work is finished.'

These limitations of time were disagreeable—nevertheless he comforted himself with the reflection that by and by she would cease to use them. After the storm and stress of the past days he could look forward with happiness. If she stayed once, she would stay for all. He was not to lose his treasure. He could now be thankful for his blindness—that very blessing in disguise which was to bind her to him—endow him with all those benefits which sprung from their companionship. Some day, too, she would be thankful she had never embarked upon a course which could only have brought her disappointment. With him she would be guarded and shielded; should possess everything her heart could desire, or his love could secure to her. Their work together would prosper. She was far more than mere sight and hands to him. She was his equal and fellow-student, keen to grapple with diffi-

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culties, and overcome them. Some day—in the future—it was true she might marry—but marriage need not mean separation from him. The idea that she might have children was slightly disturbing, but could safely be relegated to the far off time in which calamities are too indefinite to affray. He could still have wished she had never formed the desire to leave him; she would have conformed more absolutely to his ideal had she been proof against the restless, modern spirit, with its power of mischievous destruction for all that was most essentially womanly and beautiful. Yet the lapse, he thought, was but a temporary one, and in the time to come she would make amends for the suffering she had caused him.

'I must find some work,' said Katharine, breaking the silence.

'I have no doubt, my dear, there will not be much difficulty in doing that.'

'I mean, father, work with a *human* interest.'

Works of charity come naturally to good women. 'I do not think that will be hard in Allington,' he answered, 'there are plenty of poor here.'

'There are some things I should like to teach.'

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'Well,' he returned, 'I daresay your mother will be able to help you in that direction. She is much interested in evening classes. You must not, however, let her monopolise too much of your time, and I do not think her methods are very likely to appeal to you. Indeed, I should be very sorry to see you bitten with the mad unreasoning passion for what she and others call *reform*.'

'Well, but don't you think lots of reforms are necessary?'

The Dean shook his head. 'Believe me, Katharine,' he said, solemnly, 'nothing will ever be effected by the thousand and one panaceas advertised in the market place. I cannot believe you capable of wishing to share in the vulgar scramble of philanthropy, with all its brand new patent nostrums, for the saving of the world. You have read your Plato, Katharine—you ought to know that his words are final.'

'"Till kings are philosophers, and philosophers are kings,"' quoted Katharine, '"cities will not cease from ill,—no, nor the human race either."'

'Yes, Katharine, those words will endure

long after the childish, unavailing fret and babble, of what they call reform, has worn itself into silence. Your work, Katharine, is not to enter on any foolish strife with the inevitable, but to grow perfect.'

'But why not try for the time when kings will be philosophers, and philosophers kings?'

'Foolish child! No; waste no time on what can never be, on what is tantamount to the impossible. You women, Katharine, seem to me especially open to spend fruitless energies in this direction. And at what a loss! You are bawling yourselves red and hoarse on public platforms, jostling and pushing shoulder to shoulder with men, when you ought to be set aloof for their worship, preserving for their wonder and refreshment a calm and beauty which they can never attain. And instead of this, you, of your own accord, step down from your pedestals, and trail your skirts among the crowd. And at what a loss, I say! A man may walk through seas of mud, and emerge clean; but a woman spoils and defiles for ever her beautiful garments.'

Katharine found these homilies wearisome. She rose and moved restlessly about the room.

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And so,' she said, 'we each ought to stay in a niche in the wall, built just as high as we ought to grow.'

'Always above us, my love,' replied the Dean, and the conversation ended.

A stormy September passed away, and October came with mild days of chastened sunlight, touched with the gentle sadness of the declining year. The early mornings were very beautiful, and between seven and eight o'clock Katharine's windows were veritable 'magic casements, opening on the foam of perilous seas in faëry lands forlorn.' As she looked out, all the land visible to her would be part of the garden slope, bounded by a belt of trees, sharply defined against a wide ocean of mist, silver-pale in the increasing light, or touched by faint rays of the rising sun. Sometimes mysterious islands would emerge from it; sometimes it was an unbroken level waste as far as eye could reach; sometimes, like an immense inland lake, it was bounded by the hills which rose on the opposite river-bank—a dim and ghostly strand, on which the silent seas broke in a surf that never fell. As she leaned out into the morning air to watch the changing

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wonder—land would emerge as from a flood, gradually and in patches. Later still, when Nature had withdrawn those illusive veils of hers, it was possible to see plainly the havoc autumn had wrought in the woods,—full of dark cavernous places, where the fires of the beeches had burnt themselves out.

The mists of these early mornings made for Katharine a semblance of the sea she loved, and the beauty great Nature gave her, comforted her soul when her own life, and the lives of those about her, seemed most futile and vain. She consoled herself with the thought that her imprisonment was but for a while, and that at no very distant day she would be able to employ herself in some work more relevant to life than the compilation of a philological treatise for a few professors to wrangle over. Every day passed like the last in so much writing for her father, and so much reading and practising for herself. Little happened to break the monotony of the weeks. Sometimes, as opportunity offered, she would sharpen her wits by a theological argument with a stray curate, who would retire shocked and discomfited, to leave for her on the following

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day some volume on Christian evidences, neatly wrapped in brown paper. Nevertheless her buoyant spirits were often dashed, and she sometimes found herself doubting the good of her existence. She had always liked to trace what she called the *raison d'être* of things. At present she could see none for herself.

In the mean time the rest of the world jogged on its way contentedly enough. Mrs Marchant, cumbered with much serving, cheerfully busied herself in countless philanthropic affairs of deep import, with a not unhappy consciousness of six months' unremitting toil before her. The Dean corresponded with his publisher despatched the completed pages of the great work to a typewriter, and preached a course of exceptionally able sermons, which, to good Mrs Vachell in particular, for reasons known only to herself, gave evidence of the most saintly Christian fortitude.

One afternoon, at three o'clock, a large sewing party assembled in the Deanery drawing-room, and Katharine, rather against her will, was pressed into service, and set to work on a mysterious looking garment. From thirty to forty ladies, of ages varying from sixteen to

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sixty, were arranged on groups of low chairs and settees, like the blessed of Paradise about their central sun, while Mr Manders occupied the middle of the circle in an elevated position, and read to them as they sewed. On his entrance he had bowed very coldly to Katharine, who, at their last meeting, had been rude enough to laugh at a highly scientific sentence of his on "Spiritual Protoplasm." To-day she was not in the mood to have offended him by a keen sense of humour; for some inexplicable reason, she was bereft of her usual merriment, and life appeared too serious for a laugh. The long drawing-room was warm, filled with mellow, autumn sunlight, with bright fires at either end, and she longed to set the French windows open and let in the air. She sewed hard, concentrating all her attention on her work, that she might not hear those monotonous tones of Mr Manders, which to-day were more than usually irritating. At four o'clock, according to rule, he shut his book and disappeared, and every one began to talk in a way that set the unreasonable Katharine longing once more for the philosophy of Professor Drummond. She promised herself release in half an hour,

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and began a new seam with a wish that she were not forced to sit sociably on the same settee with Miss Carter, and the young wife of a curate who was entertaining her friend with a dreadful scandal in connection with the Blanket Society.

'And no less than three of them were found in the pawnshop,' she wound up, with breathless conclusion.

Thereupon, as by a natural sequence, conversation drifted easily on to the subject of the diabolical wickedness of the working classes.

'I do not believe,' said Miss Carter, laying her work upon her lap in the solemnity of the assertion, 'that *one* of my women would go to church from one year's end to another if it were not for the coal tickets.'

'What!' said Katharine, breaking off a thread with a scandalized expression, 'you don't mean to say the whole of their religion is for the sake of fires in their grates.

Miss Carter was seriously afraid it was.

'Well,' retorted Katharine, with bitter mischief, 'do you not think, that while these wicked poor go to church for the sake of warmth

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in this world, others are regular attendants in order to escape the fires of the other?'

Mrs Lilly looked shocked, and remained speechless, but Miss Carter, whose views were advanced, was equal to the occasion.

'We don't believe in eternal perdition *now*,' she said.

'Then I suppose you believe in Purgatory?'

'Certainly not!' she returned, with asperity; 'I am not a Romanist.'

'But surely,' said Katharine, looking very wicked, 'you don't think *I* shall go to heaven directly I die.'

It is impossible to say by what manœuvres Miss Carter would have extricated herself from the horns of this dilemna, for Mrs Marchant here interrupted the conversation with a request for a song from her daughter. 'Perhaps, my love,' she said, 'you could sing Schubert's "Young Nun"; it always sets me longing for the inspection of nunneries. I would have *female* inspectors, you know,' she continued to her immediate neighbours in a lower tone.

Katharine, however, was afraid she could not sing unless a window were opened, and others

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beside Mrs Marchant decided that the price of a song may be too high, and the general buzz began again. Miss Carter and Mrs Lilly began to discuss a strike among the miners of the surrounding district. By-and-by Mrs Lilly, who found her friend's economics rather unentertaining, took advantage of a pause in her eloquence to turn to Katharine with a question relating to a subject of more domestic interest.

'Miss Marchant,' she asked, 'have you seen Mrs Gilliard Smith since the latest arrival?'

'Not since,' answered Katharine, briefly.

'It is her eleventh, you know,' continued the lady, 'and I rather doubt whether she will be able to rear it. She has lost six already.'

"What a waste!' said Katharine, breaking off her thread.

"I don't quite understand you," said Mrs Lilly.

'I mean it is a pity to expend all that strength and energy to no purpose, or only to produce poor little stunted Gilliard Smiths.'

'They are certainly not strong,' returned Mrs Lilly, 'yet ——"

Miss Carter, as an unmarried woman, kept silence.

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'It is very bad for her, poor thing,' she continued; 'her health is dreadful, and this last confinement nearly killed her.'

Katharine folded her work. 'Once,' she said, bitterly, 'we had an elderly cat who committed suicide in the same irrational way—we drowned the kittens; the poor little unwanted babies have to make an attempt to live, at any rate.'

There was silence till she had left the room. Then the two put their heads together in horror and disgust; and the terrible coarseness of which Katharine had been guilty was remembered against her for many days to come.

She cared for nothing now except for the fact that she was free, and took cap and cape from the rack in the hall as Jenkins and Prosser emerged from the pantry with great trays of cake and tea.

Once in the open air she began to walk with long swinging strides, hardly knowing or caring whither. How small and narrow people were, and how contented with a cramped, unhealthy life! How she hated this world of unreality, of heavily carpeted rooms, gas sofas, endless posturings, brainless chatter and deliverance of

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opinions, all correct and done neatly up in parcels, to be opened on the right occasion! She would have liked to have walked for miles; away — away — away. The easterly wind touched her cheeks with a keen breath. The sunset was clear and frosty, and as she reached the lower part of the town, she saw it at its best outlined against a limpid sky. The houses of the crooked streets, and the marvellous crown of towers above them, were one deep, uniform purple, flecked with the white, straight smoke of many chimneys. In the light green and golden spaces overhead, a single planet shone with a clear radiance. On the bridge, across the river, Katharine stood still to look. The old city lay there on the hillside sleeping, with the sleeping church at its head. The current of life which had once flowed about it had been diverted into other channels, and would leave it evermore in its enchanted slumber.

Katharine retraced her steps upon the bridge, and took the lower road homewards along the river bank. Three quarters of a mile from the bridge she turned upwards to her left on a steep path, which at first, open on either hand,

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was bounded further on by the wall of the Deanery gardens, and further upward still became a narrow lane between the sides of two houses—the Dean's and the Precentor's. It led out into the close, and ended with two wooden posts, and an extra gas lamp at the top.

Katharine had walked uphill very fast, and by the time she reached this latter part of the ascent she found herself almost out of breath, and was obliged to slacken her pace. She had just passed the servant's side-entrance with footfalls that were almost noiseless in the house-shoes that for once she had been too impatient to change, when she suddenly became aware of a passive, immoveable figure waiting in the shadow a foot or two down the lane. She was unable to be certain, but she thought she recognised one of the maids.

'Good night!' she said as she passed.

The girl seemed to catch her breath and steady her voice as if she had been crying. 'Good night, miss!'

What was she doing? Why was she waiting there? What was the matter? Katharine hesitated for one moment, and then realising

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that to ask questions would be an unwarrantable interference, passed out into the close.

She had lived more than three months under the same roof with this girl, yet it struck her forcibly that she did not know her name, had never come into contact with her, or seen her except by rare chance, and was hardly able to call up any clear image of her face. As she stood at the door of the Deanery, a cart stopped at the top of the lane; the girl climbed into it with scarcely an answer to the driver's cheery remarks, and was driven away out of sight.

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CHAPTER VII

THE curtains were fast drawn in the Deanery drawing-room, full of the warm light of the logs upon the hearth, and the soft radiance of shaded lamps. Katharine, in a gown of a creamy yellow tint, copied out a piece of music at a small writing-table; while Mrs Marchant sorted finished garments from a carved chest in which she kept her needlework, intent on charitable thoughts in anticipation of Christmas.

Hilary, who had just entered the room, drew one of the thick curtains aside from the window with an attempt to look out into the wild November night—a night of pitch darkness, in which nothing was visible but the rain which streamed across the panes with every gust of wind.

'Nights like these,' said Mrs Marchant, as he dropped the curtain and came towards the fire, 'always make me feel we ought to redouble our

efforts on behalf of the deep-sea fishermen. Do you remember how, when you were little, I always made you sing the hymn for those at sea when it was stormy?'

Hilary sat down to the piano and played the tune of 'Eternal Father, strong to save,' modulating skilfully into one of Chopin's waltzes. His playing did not drown the sound of the gale without, even for himself. In weather like this the valley would be turned into a quagmire—perhaps a flood. The poplars would wave and swing over the roof of the farm, where less pliant trees were snapt and felled. If it were dreary without, it would be almost as dreary within. And she—what would she be doing?

'Hilary, wrong notes!' cried Katharine impatiently. 'Don't play that doleful prelude. It seems to get into the moan of the wind, and makes it ten times more depressing.'

Mrs Marchant thought her daughter's interruption ill-advised. She always did her best to encourage domestic occupations in the male members of her family.

'Don't stop playing, my dear,' she said. 'Could you not give us a little Mendelssohn instead of Chopin? Since I have read the

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history of his life, and know the sort of man he was, I always feel that the influence of his music cannot be a healthy one.'

'I'll play some Mendelssohn by-and-by, mother.' Hilary took a book from an occasional table, seated himself in the glow of the logs, and while to a casual observer he might have seemed to read, carried on the train of thought which had been responsible for his wrong notes at the piano. It was now quite six weeks ago since he had heard the girl was gone. It had been on the day of a large sewing-party, when the last guest had departed, and he had ventured into the erstwhile busy drawing-room for a long-deferred cup of tea. He was standing at the window to watch the remains of the dying sunset, and exchanging remarks with his mother, when Katharine had come in from a walk in cloak and hat to ask, in her abrupt, impetuous way, why one of the maids had that afternoon left the house. Mrs Marchant, with a slight digression on the folly of young servants, had replied that the girl had given out that she had had bad news from home, and appearing to be in great distress, had begged permission to leave at a few days'

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notice. What had happened after that—what Katharine had said—Hilary did not know. He had turned away from the window, and leaving his tea unfinished, had gone up stairs to his own room with a great sense of relief and freedom from care. He knew very well exactly who had departed that day, and breathed more freely. She was no longer under the same roof. He might have searched every room in the house without meeting the reproach of her face. He had said to himself that it was all over, and congratulated himself that she had had the good sense to know it. If he had ever seemed harsh or unkind, it had been for the best.

Six weeks ago the sense of relief had been uppermost in his mind; now, without any reason, he was oppressed with a feeling of worry quite as great as any he had yet experienced. After all, it was all over. A mid-summer madness and self-betrayal had ended in the disillusion of blank autumn days as an impetuous torrent of the hillside is swallowed up in the bogs of some ugly valley. Nothing now was left but a recollection tinged with disgust and regret. The play was done. It

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was madness to sit on when the radiance and gay music were ended, staring at the blank drop-curtain. It was a deeper folly still to desire to disturb its straight and decorous folds —to lift a corner and to peep behind. Better leave well alone, and forget that anything might lie beyond it.

Hilary picked up his book, which had fallen to the floor, and carefully found a place. The girl might at least have sent him a line to provide against some of the worry he was suffering on her account. It seemed safe to conjecture that she had gone back to the farm. The people there would be glad enough to receive their old drudge; any money she took back with her would prove an easy key to her old home.

Mrs Marchant looked at her son. He was not reading, but gazing before him into the fire. This winter his old cough had returned to him, and his thin face seemed to give signs that she would again have cause for some of the anxiety on his account which had too often clouded her Christmas festivities in the past. She must take care he did not go out, especially in the bad weather.

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Katharine rose from the writing-table and chose a low chair opposite her brother, under the soft light of an antique hanging lamp, which lit up her cloudy hair and clear-cut, dreamy face. Secure in her purity and pride, with a tinge of delicate Puritan superciliousness, she would not fall from her ideals as he had done. No; life was easy for dignified, deliberate, and circumspect persons. How she would shrink in horror from him if she knew. What would she say?—what would she think? Struck with a sudden desire to get at something of her thought, he gave her the book he was reading, with a request that she would give him her opinion on the last two chapters. She read very quickly, and in about half-an-hour returned it to him.

'Well?'

'I dislike moral tales.'

'Oh! But surely you agree with the main drift of the story.' He looked at her intently as his listless fingers strayed among the leaves.

She changed her position slightly, and for some moments remained gazing into the fire, while he awaited her verdict with an impatience he could not disguise from himself.

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'No; I don't think I do. I can't see that the man was a hero in marrying the girl. He didn't love her—would never have been anything but miserable with her. Two wrongs don't make a right.'

Did she realise all that had happened in the earlier chapters of the story? Hilary bent forward, slightly lowering his voice. 'But you see, Katharine, the poor girl was ruined.'

'Ruined! That's a strange word if one analyses it. When a man is ruined it is beyond his power to make commercial speculations. When a woman is ruined it is not likely that she will be able to get support for life in marriage. I suppose that is the real meaning of the term.'

This point of view appealed to Hilary as an eminently common-sense one. He regarded her with some surprise, and a not inconsiderable relief. 'And in real life,' he continued, 'the girl would in all probability have got over her disgrace in a short time. On the whole, the lower classes take those things philosophically.'

Katharine picked up the book from the floor, to which it had fallen, and tossed it on to a

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sofa 'It will do nicely for the servants' hall,' she said, with a half laugh.

'My dear Katharine,' said her mother reproachfully, 'how can you say such things! I am sure it must be the *last* book for girls of that class.'

Some time after Mrs Marchant had retired, the brother and sister sat on together in the glow of the fire. Hilary would have liked to re-open the subject with a fresh discussion of the story, but it was difficult to bring the matter up again, and he at length gave up the attempt, and returned to his old brooding thoughts. The fierce wind howled about the house, and shook the well-fitting windows. England was intolerable in autumn — the climate unbearable. How delightful it would be to find oneself transported to some other region, by sunny southern seas, where men and women took life more lightly. *Here* every pleasure masked a spectral pain which followed close upon its heels; the dregs of wine left a bitter taste in the mouth. The autumn that followed summer was dank with mist and rains, and ugly with decay. To-morrow he would make his way across the valley to the

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farm and set his anxiety at rest. Till to-morrow he would try to forget. To-morrow—to-morrow.

The three following days continuous rains kept him in-doors. On the fourth he took train into the country, and set out across the valley. Early in the day his mother discovered his absence with dismay, and as the dull afternoon wore into night, the rest of the house shared in her deepening anxiety. About eight o'clock he was brought home in the cart of a countryman, who had found him unconscious by the roadside. He was carried up to bed in a state of high fever. Katharine herself ran out across the close for a doctor, and a frightened maid-servant was sent to the institution for a nurse.

During the next three days the whole household shared in a common suspense, and even the servants went about their work with soft voices and hushed feet, as if they feared that any sudden noise or jarring movement might suffice to break the slender thread on which the life of the son of the house was hanging. At the end of a week, however, he was declared well out of danger; the nurse was dismissed,

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and Katharine and Mrs Marchant took her place in turn. Yet their patient made such tedious progress that Dr Vachell was puzzled, and hinted more than once his suspicion that his patient had some worry which retarded his recovery. Mrs Marchant also began to fear that this was the case, and with the morbidly quick intuition of intense nervous irritability, Hilary understood well enough that he was being watched, and hated to have her with him. Once, when she had pressed him vainly to take some food, and had been forced at last to send it away untouched, she could contain herself no longer.

'My dear,' she said, 'how can you expect ever to get well if you behave like this?' She bent over him with maternal solicitude. 'Hilary, my dear, you have some worry—Dr Vachell says you have—tell me, only tell me, what it is, and perhaps we may be able to set it right.'

His eyes filled with the tears of intense weakness and irritation, and as he lay upon the sofa he turned sideways from her, hiding his face.

'Let me alone!' he exclaimed, querulously.

'I can't, Hilary, for your own sake. I want

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you to get well. I implore you, tell me what it is that makes you fret, so that nothing we can do is of any use. If it is a secret, my dear, you can trust me to keep it.'

'I have no secret,' he cried, vehemently.

'Hilary, I cannot believe that—there *is* something you are hiding from me.'

'There is nothing, I tell you.' He pushed her away as she bent over him. 'Why are you always prying and spying on me? For Heaven's sake leave me alone. Go away—do go away.'

She was stung to the quick. She had given up much to be with and attend to him, and now—he did not want her—his mother. She would have done anything for him. He was the one creature in the world she cared for—and he repulsed her. She left him without a word, sending Prosser to take her place. In her hurt pride she could not ask her daughter. The sense of failure was bitter enough—she did not wish her humiliation to be witnessed.

From that day she saw, with an ever-increasing jealousy, that Katharine succeeded where she had only made matters worse than before. She was painfully alive to the fact that while

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her daughter's presence seemed to soothe him, her own had an exactly contrary effect. The wound cut deep, for she loved her son better than anything in the world. Sometimes like a stranger, hardly daring to venture near him, she would peep furtively in through the couple of screens which were drawn across his door.

Life came back to him very slowly. However time might pass, it always seemed as if that day of soaking mist were yesterday. Beyond his dislike to have his mother near him he had no strong emotion to spend upon the present and few desires or preferences. His faculties always occupied themselves with the same remembrance. Sleep was dull forgetfulness; to wake was to look upon one unchanging scene. His limbs seemed to be still numb with the painful effort he had made to drag across the clay land of the valley; the bitter chill from the wet ground was still upon him, though he had burned with fever since then.

There had been no rain that day, but a thick white fog, which had lain upon his hair and garments like fine drifted hoar-frost, and fallen in drops from the black tree branches, while the beaten bracken had lain upon the earth

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less like an organic growth than sodden beggar's rags. Hidden between the wall of a fowl-house and a gorse bush on the fringe of the common, he had lain, intently watching for some sign of life from the farm, tortured with anxieties no reasoning could shake off. Once or twice the farm, looming spectral through the mist, seemed to mock at him as the fog thickened, with a hint of total disappearance. Despite the bitter cold, he had little desire to move. Half lying, crouched against a log, a strange drowsiness had possessed him. As the fog dulled outward vision, so it seemed to penetrate to his brain, numbing all his faculties. Suddenly, both within and without, the mists had seemed to clear. A slight, small figure he knew well was visible against the left wall of the house, in a moment turned the corner and was gone. In a flash the terrible suspicion which had dogged his heels all day clung tenaciously to his breast, refusing to be shaken off. A strange dizziness had seized him, and all had become dark. His next remembrance was one of semi-delirium, in which it had seemed to him as if the valley had narrowed and closed in about him till it be-

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came a pit, at the bottom of which he lay powerless to escape. He was terribly thirsty —his throat burned like that of Dives; his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth till he longed to slake his thirst at the stagnant duck-pond—a stone's throw from him. He tried to crawl towards it—it seemed to lie at the bottom of the pit—but the further he crawled the further it receded from him. Then, just as he would have put his hands to it to cool his parched lips, it turned to liquid fire. Then it became water again, and was as far away as ever. For an interminable time he crawled and crawled towards it, only when he came within reach or touch of it to find it burning fire.

Out of all this remembrance one moment detached itself from the rest—the moment when the girl's figure had appeared distinctly against the wall of the house, and he had seen her altered—altered. As he grew stronger, however, and had the power to disentangle illusion and reality, he began to ask himself whether, after all, she too had not been the creation of his own brain.

One day, when Katharine had helped him in his first walk up and down the room, and they

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stood at the window looking out, he asked her the date. She told him that it was the 23rd of December.

'I have been ill nearly a month.' he said.

'Yes; but you will be better soon.'

He sighed impatiently. 'I wish I could go out,' he said.

'Have you any bother, Hilary?' Her presence was so winning, her touch so gentle and strong, the tones of her voice so sympathetic, that the question did not irritate him. 'If there is anything troubling you, perhaps together we could set it right. Don't tell me unless you like—but, is it a money worry?'

'Yes,' he answered, 'it is.' After all, what was there which did not resolve itself into a question of pounds, shillings, and pence? 'And,' he continued, wishing for a little sympathy, 'I could not bear to have to tell the governor.'

The charity evinced by this last statement covered much sin. 'Yes,' she returned, 'father ought not to be worried.'

Later on she brought him £20 in notes. He took it gratefully. Money could do so much. From that day he improved rapidly—

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or at least more rapidly than they had at one time dared to hope. As soon as he was able to read, he asked for a book on thought-transference and apparitions, and read it eagerly. When he had finished it he expressed an unqualified belief in the Psychical Research Society.

Katharine smiled. 'I thought you were the last person to be converted to their beliefs, Hilary.'

'Why? There is nothing that goes against science in it. An apparition is, of course, purely subjective. It has no existence anywhere but in one's own mind.'

'No,' replied Katharine; 'there is nothing more substantial at the back of the appearance than there is behind the images we see in dreams.'

Later on in the day he recurred to the same subject. 'Suppose, Katharine,' he said, 'you had a vision of a certain person, and in your vision the person appeared as you had never seen him before. There were details, we will suppose, in the apparition—details pointing to ill-health that you had never noticed before, or seen in him in reality. Would you expect the real person to be ill?'

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'I daresay I should. But that may be from mere superstition. There would be no more reason for expecting my visual hallucination to coincide with the truth than to expect dreams to come true.'

'No; of course; no more reason.' Hilary bent forward, holding his transparent hands to the flame. They trembled slightly, and his face was flushed, and his eyes bright with excitement.

'One's own state of mind and body are, of course, the real factors which help one to see visions ——'

'Or dream dreams. That is often the question of a heavy supper. I am going to the post, Hilary. Have you any letters?'

He saw through her wish to change the conversation. 'There's lots of time yet,' he said. 'Yes, of course, one's state of mind is everything. If one had been worrying about a certain person, thinking of him as having some particular illness or unhappiness, the vision, I suppose, would fill up the details of your imagination, rather than be like the normal person as you last saw him.'

'I daresay,' said Katharine, pausing on her

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way to the door. 'Visions, like dreams, would be coloured by the thoughts that went before them.'

When she had gone, Hilary leaned back in his chair with a sense of relief that was almost happiness. He was not to be tortured by his sick fancies any longer. 'Visions, like dreams, are coloured by the thoughts which go before them.'

At the New Year it was decided that Hilary should go abroad at the end of February, and so escape the treacherous English spring. The idea of leaving England gave him unfeigned pleasure, and his illness now appeared to him in the light of a blessing in disguise—his release excused his imprisonment. As he busied himself with maps and guide-books, his greatest trouble was summed up in the fact that a whole month must intervene before the time of his departure. In Italy, under radiant skies, by sunny sapphire seas, life would begin afresh—the future would confront him with a new face. Till then the tangled skein of things must be laid on one side. Under better and more inspiriting conditions, it should be taken out, unravelled and made straight.

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CHAPTER VIII.

'PATIENCE!' said Katharine to herself; 'Courage! to-day we shall make an end of it!' And at the same time she put her hand in her pocket with infinite satisfaction, feeling a letter that had come to her that morning.

As the Dean dictated the last pages of the great work, she wrote with an almost feverish haste, yet with perfect accuracy and neatness. When the last word was penned, she pushed back her chair and rose to her full height, stretching her arms over her head with a gesture of relief and delight.

'Finished!' she cried, 'finished at last!' The words had a deep signification for her—she had worked her way out of prison and was free.

The Dean passed his hand over the neatly copied pages with a smile of deep content.

'Thanks to you, my dear Katharine,' he

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said. He looked at her with grateful eyes as she walked from end to end of the long room, as if it were too small to contain her. 'Thanks to you—without your ability and patience there would have been nothing but failure.'

'And now there is a learned treatise for a few learned men to wrangle over. To think of its actually being completed to its last word! Now, father, we may shake hands over the bargain concluded with the last page.'

He held out both his to her. 'Bargain, my love, bargain ——?' he repeated, a little puzzled.

'Yes, our very sacred compact that I should place myself at your service till the great work was finished. Now that it is finished, life opens at a new chapter.'

She was like a happy child let suddenly loose from school, and began to play with the things upon the writing-desk, piling them one on top of another.

'I hope, my dear,' he said, 'it has not been too much for you. Perhaps I have been inconsiderate, but I have so much enjoyed our work together, that the very pleasure of seeing it completed is tempered by a little

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regret that some of the happiest days of my life are over. I hope I have not been over-working you. You must certainly have a holiday.'

'Holiday!' she repeated. 'O no. Now I want to think about my *own* work.'

Her own work! After all these months he had believed her to have forgotten that folly, and all the time it had only slept, and was as strong as ever.

'Your own work?' he asked, coldly.

The dangerous sensitiveness in her nature was hurt by his unsympathetic tone. Some of the brightness went out of her morning, yet outwardly she would not show herself rebuffed.

'Yes, my own work. And just in the very nick of time. On the first day I am free I have received a letter'—she drew it out of her pocket—'from my friend Mary Field to say she has found a post for me.'

So not only was this restless discontent, which spoiled an otherwise fine nature, still alive in her, but was fanned into flame, encouraged by some foolish woman who would lead her to her bane.

'And what is this—post?'

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'That of librarian in a Woman's Literary and Scientific Association, in which she is the leading spirit. The salary is not large, but it is enough to live upon, and an excellent step to something better.'

'How much is it?'

'£80 a year.'

'What preposterous folly, Katharine. You actually are simple enough to imagine that you, with your tastes and breeding, can live on that. It is absurd.'

'I do not think so. I am going to live with Mary, and even if there are some things I have to go without, I shall be very happy, and shall see life as I long to.'

'My poor child, you are very much mistaken in your notions of the world.'

'I daresay. I don't know more about it than most girls who live at home. I daresay it will give me some rough knocks at first, but that will be salutary. I must be independent —feel my own feet. I can't walk in leading strings all my life.'

'And yet, my dear, if you would but see it, your way in life is plain enough before you.'

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'Father, if I were a man you would not say that.'

'No; but you are a woman, with other duties —other laws to obey.'

'Then you wish me to remain as I am now —in a glass case all my life.'

'My dear, if you would but stifle this discontent that ruins you, you would be the noble woman I long to see you, whom no contact with an ugly world would improve. As it is, you are everything to me.'

'Father, you are too easily satisfied if you think I have not a thousand things to learn.'

'If that is so, and it doubtless is, believe me that the "daily round and common task" will provide all that is necessary to your discipline —room to deny yourself ——'

'But I do not want to deny myself. I want to be free and happy. Sometimes I can hardly breathe in this place; it stifles me; I want a newer, keener life.'

He heard her with a difficult patience. Self —self—self. She put herself first; he was of no account.

'I ask you this, Katharine, what good is there that cannot be done among those you

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love? Why should you go further afield to do it? I will willingly give you money for any plans you choose.'

'Father,' she answered, turning suddenly and abruptly from him, 'it is no good for us to argue, we shall never see alike.'

'You are restless and discontented. Here is your happiness or nowhere. You will not find it in London if you cannot find it here.'

'I shall only find it,' she said, 'where my work is.'

'And so you will go away and leave me for a mere chimera—you, the only thing I have—the only thing I love.'

'Then, if you love me, let me go; if I am mistaken, I can come back.'

She stood by the mantelpiece, with one hand resting upon it, as he sat in his desk chair, turning towards her.

'Let you go to your own harm,' he cried, 'when I need you—want you!'

She looked at him with a curious sense of being further from him than ever before in her life. She looked at him almost coldly, with a curious sense of aloofness.

'I think,' she said, slowly, 'you merely want

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me—wanting is not loving. Why should you have thought I meant to stay with you always? I have stayed too long already.'

'You regret that you have made the happiness of my life during the last few months?'

'No—no—not that!' Oh! why should he misunderstand her so?

'Then why must you leave me—why must you imagine that happiness is only to be found away from us?'

There was silence, save for the ticking of the clock. What wide abysses of misunderstanding were opening out between them, who had been such dear companions, such perfect friends. All the months of patient waiting and working had only led to this. She was going to leave things a little worse than she had found them. Worst of all, she must appear cruel and heartless, and in no way was it possible for her to justify herself to him. They might reason upon the matter till doomsday; the most logical arguments might be brought forward on both sides without advancing them one step nearer to the other. In the midst of an ominous and uncomfortable silence, Mrs Marchant sailed into the room with a business-

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like piece of paper and a pencil, and she seized the opportunity for escaping to her room. She must write to Mary Field, and, finding pen and paper, she wrote her decision boldly in black and white, in a dull and heavy mood, curiously at variance with her buoyant spirits of the morning. She had been accommodating and pliable so long—lying on the feather-bed of approval, that the first consciousness of standing alone was as unpleasant as the first cold shock of the sea to a sickly bather.

Her acceptance of the post made it necessary for her to leave home that same week, and on the following day all the gossips of Allington had got news of her departure, and were puzzling over its import, and concocting little stories to account for it. In the mean time Katharine became aware that her position in the house was changed, and that she no longer had a place in it. It was a prison from which she longed to escape, and she the one criminal in it, at whom every one looked askance; and while her mother irritated her with random attacks, her father's face haunted her like a reproach, and his silence became unbearable. Every time she saw him it

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seemed to her that his face had grown more haggard and deeply lined, and the continual thought of it filled her with compunction, and made her waver in a sea of painful doubt.

On the third day from that of her decision, she received a letter from her friend to tell her that she should be travelling southward, and would be glad to see her at midday during her forty minutes wait early in the afternoon. She found it a relief to lunch alone, and to set out in good time immediately afterwards.

In the close she met Dr Vachell, who, just about to enter his carriage, stopped, with a confidential air, to speak to her.

'Ah,' he said, 'my dear Miss Katharine, you are the very person I wanted to see.'

She felt a little annoyed at the interruption. She wanted to get to the station, yet she had allowed herself far more time than was necessary. She controlled her impatience with an effort.

'Am I?' she said, as he paused with a keen glance at her own pale face.

'Yes. I do not know whether you are aware that this morning I—dropped in—er—perhaps I may as well tell you, Miss Katharine, on a

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hint from Mrs Marchant to see your father. You will understand that—er—my visit was in one sense hardly a professional one. In spite of that, however, I found him ill, Miss Katharine, ill.'

'What is it—what is the matter?' she asked, half guiltily.

'That is just what I want you to tell me, my dear young lady. Some trouble is weighing upon him terribly—some great mental anxiety. At the same time I found him using his eyes—writing and reading. If he persists in this, Miss Katharine, all the good you have wrought will be undone. He will lose his sight in a few weeks, instead of preserving it for yet another twelvemonth. Miss Katharine, this is a state of things which must be put a stop to.'

'How?' She asked the question coldly, in a tone which surprised the Doctor, who began to ask himself if some of the gossip he had heard about her, which stigmatised her as unkind, was true.

'Do you ask me, Miss Katharine? I have come to you as the best doctor, for I confess I am baulked. You have done so much, I thought it possible that you might be able to

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relieve this trouble—might give help and solace as you have done before.'

'You thought that,' said Katharine, and without another word she turned abruptly and walked swiftly away, leaving him more than ever puzzled and dismayed.

'There is something wrong in that quarter, too,' he said, looking after her. 'Dear me, dear me. She was positively rude. Why was that? Was it because I was inconsiderate enough to keep her standing here in the damp and cold? No, no, I think she was worried.'

The sleet, which had been falling at intervals all day, began again as Katharine went hastily down the steep street; but, preoccupied with one thought, she did not feel it cut her face. There was one thing which she had to say to Mary—say, and get over as quickly as possible—one thing which she repeated over and over again to herself on the way to the station. She reached it ten minutes too soon—ten minutes, which seemed like an eternity as she paced from end to end of the long platform, unconscious of the presence of any one beside herself. The train was late. She felt annoyed, she could hardly have told why, and then

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reflected that after all the less time they had to spend together the better. They were to have had forty minutes—now it would be only thirty. The train was signalled at last. She watched it round a curve, and among a crowd of jostling spectres recognised her friend.

At any other time the beauty and bloom of Mary's face above her rich furs would have pleased her. To-day she had no delight, no happiness of welcome in her heart, only the desire to say one thing and have done with it. With no answering smile, she caught her by the arm.

'I can't come, Mary,' she said, almost hoarsely.

Mary blindly trusted her boxes to Fate and the porters. There was no time to lose, and she drew Katharine into a waiting-room with lips and brows suddenly grown stern. In the most secluded corner, close to a window, which looked out upon a dismal line of cabs, she spoke.

'This is nonsense!' she said; 'you have already given me your decision.'

'Then I must retract it. My father is ill, and if I go will lose his sight.'

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Mary looked at her steadily. '*You* are ill,' she replied, 'and acting under an emotional strain. You must come.'

'I cannot,' said Katharine, 'I am desperately worried. There are two paths in front of me, and I do not know which to take.'

'Can you doubt, Katharine? One leads to health, happiness, growth—to the world which wants women like the woman you may become; the other to slavery, a wicked sacrifice, a rendering up of yourself and all your powers for the selfish satisfaction of an old man.'

'My own father,' cried Katharine, with a sort of protest against the hard-sounding phrase.

'Yet none the less an exacting and selfish man.'

'No, no,' said Katharine, with that instinct of weak loyalty common to women and dogs.

'Then you are blind—and a blind devotion is not worth that much ——' Mary snapped her fingers. 'Try to imagine him some one else's father, Katharine; or allowing him to be your own, is it a proper filial office to encourage the worst forms of selfishness in a parent?'

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'Nevertheless, I am bound to him.'

'Bound to him—by what? There is only one thing which binds human souls to each other—that is love. You do not love him, you are only afraid of giving him pain.'

'Mary, the situation is more difficult than you realise. For the last five months he has been my work. I have devoted myself to making him happy—to protecting him from worry—to staving off his affliction. Now I suddenly strike at him what is perhaps the hardest possible blow—I perhaps make him blind before the time. How can I? How can I?'

The sleet beat at the window, and the line of horses in the cabs outside cowered beneath it, and within another storm went over her.

'You are wrong, dear. You take too much responsibility upon your own shoulders. If you stay now, the meshes will wind themselves more tightly than ever round your feet. Break away—break away while you can.'

'I owe him so much.'

'And what about your other debt—whose labours have prepared the world for you—made your life of scholarship possible—who

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has fed, clothed, sustained you. Will you forget all your debt to that larger world?'

'If I could only make him understand.'

'You want to justify yourself. You are still so much of a weak woman that you have to lean on the approval and approbation of those around you. Very well. Let every act of your life be measured by the amount of applause you are to get for it. Never stand out alone. Never step into the street. Bask eternally in the warmth of domestic affection, like a cat upon a comfortable hearth-rug. You are not the Katharine I knew!'

'But I am—I am. I have not altered. Give me a little longer to decide. You misjudge my father. He is not what you say, only perhaps he cannot understand the needs of our generation.'

Mary looked at her watch. The half hour was nearly up. 'You will come?' she said.

'How much longer can you give me to decide?'

'The train is coming in now.'

They went out on to the platform, and Mary chose her carriage in silence. 'Well?' she said.

'I suppose I must let the chance go.'

Mary took her place, and grasped Katharine's hand. It was the first time they had touched.

'Dear—dearest Katharine—say what I want you to say.'

'Oh how I wish I could, but I can't. I have not the heart.'

All the doors were being slammed to. Mary longed for another five minutes. She leant out of the window—

'You will come?' she said.

'No, no.'

'Don't say that. Think it over. There is still time. Telegraph before midday to-morrow.'

Katharine walked slowly homeward, passing as she went the cheerless grey walls of a new building, in front of which a crowd had gathered. That was another prison for women. Her mother, among a little crowd of Allington philanthropists, saw her pass with dismayed disgust, having pictured her in imagination as an integral part of an interesting ceremony, in a suitable dress of neutral tint she had specially provided for the occasion.

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She arrived at the Deanery drenched with sleet, and as she stood in the hall taking off her cloak, the Dean emerged from his study on his way to the Cathedral evensong. He came up to her with his old gentle consideration and dislike to see her physically discomfited.

'My dear child,' he said, 'I am afraid you are very wet.'

'Not very, father.' How ill and worn he looked, and his eyes—his eyes were surely altered during those last few days.

'Father!'

'Yes, my dear.'

'Could you come into the study one moment.'

They went together. The wet drops glistened upon her hair, and she was icy cold.

'Come to the fire, my love. Have you been to the station?'

'Yes. I have seen Mary Field. I have told her; she understands that I shall not leave home—at present.'

She was stony—immoveable—cold.

'I am glad, Katharine, for both our sakes.'

She was to stay with him—after all, thank

God! She was to stay. It was such an unspeakable relief to feel, that in spite of all that had passed, he was not to lose her; that it seemed to him that the blood in his pulses ran quicker, and half his life came back again.

'My dear Katharine,' he said, 'this news makes me feel ten years younger.'

She shivered slightly. It was now her turn to look old and pale. He put an extra log upon the fire, and touched her dress.

'My dear love, I am afraid you are on the sure way to a very bad cold. Let me ring for Prosser to help you change your things.'

'No; please don't, I had rather be alone. She glanced at the clock. 'Look, father, you will be late.'

She bent down over the hearth, stretching out her hands to the flames, almost as if she avoided his touch, and with a parting injunction to her to look better on his return, he left her.

As he shut the door behind him she stood upright, and making a step or two towards the window, watched him cross the close,

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remaining there for some time after he had disappeared, oblivious of her wet boots and dress.

'What am I?' she asked, staring out into the gathering dusk, 'what am I?' The answer to the question was beyond her.

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CHAPTER IX.

THE February sleet beat against the exposed windows of the farm, and made great rings upon the filthy duck-pond, breaking down the thin coating of ice which still partially covered it. A cheerless silence was about the place, only broken by the plashing drops in the pools among the mud, and the sighing moan of the wind in the poplars; the very animals huddled dumb together in the barns and sheltered places, stricken with the prevailing damp and chill. About eleven o'clock, however, this silence was partially broken by sounds of unusual commotion within. Doors slammed violently; angry voices cursed and shouted; a man strode out into the yard at the rear, swearing at the dogs; a woman scolded and shrieked till sheer exhaustion forced her to desist. Then the silence reasserted itself, and everything was as before.

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Two hours passed. At twelve o'clock the man returned, and one or two labourers passed in for their mid-day meal. At the time when they might have been supposed to be busily engaged upon it, a girl appeared at a side door and ran wildly out into the road. For nearly half a mile she rushed along between the hedges with the extremity of terrified speed. Forced to slacken her pace in order to regain her spent and sobbing breath, she looked back from time to time to assure herself she was not followed. Her eyes were swollen with crying, and her lips drawn tightly back over a mouth open and set with the expression of a hunted creature. For hours the fear of pursuit remained with her, and she started at every sound, and at the noise of a cart would hide behind a bush till it had passed her. As time went by, however, she grew less cautious, drawing her shawl over her face, and contenting herself with giving no answer to the friendly offer of a lift.

The afternoon wore slowly on. Her pace grew gradually slower, in spite of all her efforts to keep it up, and it became increasingly difficult to fight against the driving sleet, while

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her clothes clung to her heavy with wet. Her body was hot and fevered; her brain on fire with thoughts that burned and stung. Over and over again they came—the same brain pictures, limited as her life, only deep with the significance of a pain which seemed to be unbounded.

The farm in the marshy valley—the only home she had ever known, being a little girl there, glad to run about in sunshine; to play with a bundle of rags, so loved and kissed that it grew to the semblance of what was human; to make chains of daisies in the fields, not knowing the fields were ugly and bare, because the daisies were so pretty. Growing older, and being made to work till she was tired—so tired that the daisies seemed hardly worth picking, and the doll only good as a bed-fellow at night. Getting up very early in the morning to attend to the animals—loving them better than the doll, yet having their bad points rather thrust upon her from want of leisure to study their good. Always being frightened lest she should spill the milk or break the eggs she was sent to find, erratically disposed of by the hens in strange places. Glad to keep out of the way of the older

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people, who swore loudly, drank and scolded on all occasions and none, and continually sought to impress upon her the great debt of gratitude she owed to them, who had taken her out of charity. Very terrified of 'him,' who had thrashed her more than once or twice; almost equally so of 'her,' the sound of whose strident voice she hated, the sight of whose coarse face she loathed Days which were made up of nothing but scrubbing, washing dishes, and churning butter; nights when she crept to bed sick with a loneliness no longer to be eased with an old doll, forgotten only in the sound sleep of youth which brings day, with its drudgery, so soon again. Then growing into a girl, 'in her teens,' with added work and added want for something she knew not what. Sundays and week-days much the same—days of the same sordid labour, same brief words of speech, unmarked by any events, except for the advent of a travelling hawker, who periodically would stop at the door with his basket of small wares, bobbins, needles, and pins. Something the pedlar would have beside these, half-hidden at the bottom of his tray—something to the possession of which she looked forward

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for months together. She had rarely any money, and so would take two or three eggs from the hen-roost, or pick some fruit from the garden, and run as her chance presented itself to a certain spot along the road, at which. having finished his main business at the front door, the hawker would be waiting for her on a secret understanding, and produce for her delight a paper-covered novelette, or a penny story with an illustrated cover, depicting the charms of a lovely *blonde* heroine, who, through some strange magic, henceforward became a part of her own little world, and made it a wonderland with her adventures and her love —that strange, incomprehensible, sweet thing for which she too vaguely yearned.

And so the years passed, till they brought a time marked off from all the rest—a time which made all the years which had preceded it only like some anxious and painful dream, suddenly shaken off with morning. And with it came a transformation not less great than the instantaneous change from semi-darkness to daylight. For a little time the scene of her life remained the same, and yet was altered. The hillside, the fields she had wearied of,

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thinking she knew their every corner, invited and surprised her with interests and delights she had never suspected. She grew fond of the animals, talked to the cows at milking time, played with the dogs that heretofore she had hardly noticed, and discovered materials for laughter in the ridiculous and conceited behaviour of the denizens of the poultry yard, where humour had never before suggested itself. Even the human beings about the place grew less repulsive, and she herself was changed in such a way that she met the indignity, which once would have crushed her, with contempt, and the scolding, once food for tears, with laughter. Then the scene of her life was changed. With half-shut, timid eyes, she took the first step into the unknown, to find that a capricious Fortune had awarded the daring of her spirit with more than she had hoped. At the height of her ambition she trod the world's stage, like one enchanted, while masked illusions attended on her dream, and Reality bided her time, till comedy should give place to tragedy. The pedlar's romances, lying neglected in the attic she had left behind her, became as the tales of soothsayers,

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to which the days brought each their measure of verification, and which the years would absolutely fulfil. A strange mystery wrapped and lifted her. The drudgery of her new life became light. All day time went fast, and brought the evenings, and content; the golden sunsets, the long perfumed twilights, the sight of stars above the trees.

This was for a summer, then the world changed again. The grey, transmuted into gold, became grey once more—only greyer and colder. Once again at the farm in the clay valley, the old pain of living returned; the burden thrown off for a little space again weighted her. Next a new terror began to shape itself, waking her from sleep to torture her with an agonising possibility in the night; speaking to her by day in hints, in the new life of the sprouting seed, in the first lamb dropped by the ewes. Then the doubt a certainty—the poplars whispering it over and over all day long, till she wished the lightning or the axe would strike them. A suspicion dogging and following her. Within doors, furtive questioning looks of the women; without, faces in the very stones and boughs, staring

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at her in the same way. The suspicion growing till it shaped itself into speech—scoldings, accusation, oaths, laughter; a foulness never dreamed of suddenly asserting itself in naked horror before her, till, sick with disgust, wounded and blind, she ran wildly out to escape from it, always with the fear that it might overtake her in the person of the brutal man she knew as master.

She battled on against the wind and sleety flaw, conscious only of one desire—to escape. The fear of what she had left behind her was only a shade more terrible than the alien world of which she knew nothing, except that it was cruel and heartless to such as she. She had a few pence in her pocket, but she thought she would rather die than ask for a night's lodging. If at any time she stopped, it seemed to her as if 'the master' must overtake her with the same foul abuse, and the same blows as those of the morning. Even now she thought he must be upon the road, with the bitter malignity which delights in the torture and agony of its victim. If she could only die before he found her! She did not want to die—yet how could she live? How could she live with the

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whole world against her on his side? A sign-board suggested a new idea to her. Allington —at Allington there was a river—a river as a last resort if he should track her down in that great place of crowded houses and many people. She followed the finger of the sign-post to Allington and to the river.

Towards dusk she reached the long straggling rows of workmen's cottages which formed the outskirts of the town. Passers by found her a disreputable looking object enough, with the marks of a long tramp on her wet shoes and draggled clothing, and now and then the rough jeer of some coarse girl or lad made her shrink yet further into the shadow as her heart beat quicker above her burden. Yet body and brain were alike numbed with the fatigue of her long journey in the mud and sleet. The fever had left her; the rush of thoughts which had tortured her so many hours was now swallowed up in sheer physical weariness. Mental torture had in some measure given way before the miseries of fatigue and hunger as she vaguely realized that she was penetrating the outskirts of the town.

At a corner she stopped a moment to draw

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the shawl more closely round her, and as she did so became aware of the figure of a man a few paces from where she stood. It was already too dark to see his face, but in a moment the wild, unreasoning fear of pursuit revived within her. Just as she read suspicion and hate in the most unconcerned faces she met, so the quickening of the man's pace as she looked at him was to her a positive proof that he was following, and wished to overtake her. Concentrated to a point, all the anguish of the day revived within her.

She began to run as best her failing limbs would allow her, and never daring to look behind, turned corner after corner till half a mile or so of crooked streets brought her, to her dismay, into a wide open space. Breathless and nearly blind with terror, a great doorway in a wall opened to her the friendly shelter of its dark recess. She entered without hesitation, and crouching into a corner hidden by the flap of the door, slowly recovered her breath. She had come for sanctuary to the Cathedral itself.

Five minutes passed and her enemy had not found her. Once more she was able to breathe, peeping out of her dark refuge through the

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upper panes of a great swing door, to sink back alarmed at the sight of a man's figure seated among rows of empty chairs. Farther away than her glance had reached people were singing. Boys and men sang together. Then a single voice rose and fell in monotonous cadence, broken now and then by two notes from the singers. Next came a moment of silence, and then music softly played, in the midst of which, to her horror, the swing door opened, and men and women emerged from it by twos and threes, so close that their garments brushed her own, leaning flat back against the wall in the shadow. When all had disappeared, and fully five minutes had elapsed since the exit of the last, she ventured once more to look inside. Without it was sleeting again, and the wind drove the white flakes into her as she stood. Within, as she craned timidly in to see, the whole great place was deserted, except at the remote east end, in which a single figure went to and fro, extinguishing the lights.

A few paces up the nave a great stove sent out an inviting and friendly glow, and the vast place, so warm and yet so nearly bare of hostile human life, seemed to offer her kindly shelter

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from the cold world without, with its countless prying eyes and cruel tongues. She pushed the door quite open, entered, let it swing noiselessly behind her, and in a moment ensconced herself within the shadows of the first great pillar within reach, her only anxiety to know herself quite safe—safe to lay her weary body in the radiance of the stove and forget. Among the mysterious shadows yonder darkness fell, and the only other creature beside herself within the walls of this strange and marvellous house came down a flight of steps, and slowly made his way along the aisle, stopping every now and then to move a chair or kneeler into its place. One lay a few yards from her, and she debated fearfully whether she should stretch herself along the ground to restore it to its position before it should attract his attention so near her. She trembled, fearing to make the attempt as he went towards the glowing stove, opening the door of it, so that the light fell in wider radius, illuminating his figure as he stooped to warm his hands. She watched him—the one animate thing in the yawning vastness, gigantic, invested with all the attributes of terror as of something more than human. After a pause, which seemed to

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her an eternity, he moved down the nave towards the last gas bracket. He had passed her without seeing her—she was drawing a breath of inexpressible relief—when the misplaced mat attracted his attention. As he stooped to set it straight his keen eyes caught sight of an unusual deepening of the shadow between the pillar and the wall—probably a coat or cloak which had fallen there. Something very like an oath escaped him as the inanimate bundle shaped itself to his nearer gaze into the unmistakable figure of a woman—most strange still in this place—a woman of the lower classes. Very short inspection put the matter beyond a doubt. If more confirmation had been needed, the creature herself supplied it by rising from her crouching position, and staring round her with the gesture of one found in her last extremity of escape.

'Good Lord,' exclaimed the excellent Mr. Graves, forgetting all that reverence due to sacred places, of which he was usually a living personification, 'I should like to know what you mean, young woman, by hiding here at this time? This is n't a game for honest, respectable folks! Why don't you go home?' He

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surveyed her from head to foot, a sneer on his usually obsequious face. 'You have n't got a home? Then you'd better be off to the workhouse. We don't keep up this here magnificent cathedral to give such as you a night's lodging in. I've a good mind to give you in charge, that I have. Come on now——"

He would have seized her by the shoulder. She started from him with a low moan of terror, and twisting erratically out of his grasp like a creature in a cage, brought her body violently in contact with a great stack of chairs, so loosely piled together that they fell with crash after crash on the resounding floor. If anything had been needed to complete the girl's horror, this sustained reverberation (of which, in her blind fright and confusion, she scarcely understood the cause) would have been more than enough. Fear gave wings to her feet. She rushed from pillar to pillar, the whole black space peopled as she went, with creatures ready to take vengeance on the outcast and criminal, who had dared desecrate this sanctuary. Once again she fled out into the night—to the river.

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CHAPTER X.

'WHAT am I?' asked Katharine, staring out into the late February afternoon. 'What am I?'

Regularly twice a day, at the sound of the bells, the close might be said to shake itself and turn upon its side before it fell off to sleep again. Half-a-dozen small choristers had made their way by slow progress in leap-frog across the green, with a zest enhanced by the fact that games were forbidden at that particular hour and place, disappearing rapidly at the advent of Mr Graves, to enjoy five minutes' meditation among the tombs. The congregation had appeared by twos and threes in the usual order of a Friday afternoon;—the reverend curate, portly and slow, and inclined to be cross, because he had, as usual, been kept waiting by Mrs Carter, who had been detained at a mothers' meeting; Mr Slocock, a curate of catholic tastes in athletics and evangelical

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tendencies in religion, enjoying with equal enthuiasm cricket with the Allington youth or tennis with the parson's daughters; Mrs Gilliard-Smith, in whose mind existed a close connection between fish for dinner and evening prayer—the latter a natural sequence to the former, proper for days of abstinence, and by far the hardest ordeal of the two, even though the Allington fishmonger was not to be depended on, necessitating many futile and despairing injunctions to Hilda, aged thirteen, to see that dear papa's tea was comfortable when he came in, and that the baby, number two, did not tumble down the kitchen stairs. A sprinkling of old ladies, of both sexes, had brought up the rear, and the bell had ceased to ring a few minutes after the disappearance of the Dean in the direction of the vestry.

Katharine had seen none of this, so preoccupied had she been with her own thoughts, but by and by a more blank and passive mood succeeded her day of active misery, and she became conscious of the growing dusk, in which the sleet once more began to fall, and she thought to herself that it was neither rain, hail, nor snow, but just that sleety flaw in which the *neutrali* in the

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next life are condemned for ever to follow the flag they would not follow in this. She shivered with cold and damp. She might as well write to Mary at once; there would be no need now to send a telegram. She went to her blotting-case and took out a sheet of paper. It was too dark to see to write. She crossed to the mantel-piece and felt for the matches under the picture of 'Fortune and her Wheel.' Not finding them there, too listless and weary to search for them, or even ring the bell for lights, she returned to her place at the window. Even-song was not yet over, and for the moment the snow had ceased to fall, while not a soul was in sight. 'Stay! what was that!' A flying, draggled figure tore along the east side of the close, and without a moment's hesitation plunged into the open cathedral porch. What could it mean? What could that matter to her? Yet, the figure —the girl's or woman's figure expressed an agonised pursuit. Katharine's listless mood dropped away from her like a veil which had benumbed all her faculties. She went out into the hall, took her cloak and cap, which were hanging there, and without stopping to fasten any buttons, went out into the open air, making

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her way towards the spot into which the apparition had disappeared. The congregation came out of the porch as she did so—all the well-known accustomed figures, portly, satisfied, well-dressed—a company among whom it was hardly possible to imagine the draggled spectre she had seen from the window. She walked the whole circumference of the close, seeking for a sign of it. She even peeped at last into the cathedral itself, now quite deserted and almost in darkness, and feeling completely baffled, asked herself whether what she had witnessed had been merely the creation of her own brain. That seemed more than unlikely, and she walked slowly the length of the building, loth to give up the search. Suddenly she heard footsteps; the figure emerged from the porch, some fifty yards behind her, and struck at a run across the plot of grass towards the south-west corner of the close. Just there an opening, lit by a gas lamp, gave access to a path which led by a steep slope down to the bank of the river. Katharine guessed at an omnious purpose in this headlong course. She perceived the futility of attempting to stop the fugitive from behind, and making no attempt to follow,

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climbed the low wall immediately in front of her, dividing the wooded bank from the close. She thus began to make her way direct to the river, knowing that with the start thus gained, and the time saved by the straighter and steeper *route*, she might reach the foot of the path before the girl, and check the rush, which must otherwise infallibly send her into the stream beneath them. So they went—the one springing and climbing over the steep uneven ground, catching at the tree branches, strong, sure-footed, and warm with the glow and excitement of the chase; the other, rushing to her fate as surely as an arrow shot from a bow, a stone cast from a height. She could not now have stopped herself, even had she desired. The trees whizzed passed her, the white patches of snow rose on her left. Her brain went round and round in a giddy whirl of blurred sensation. She could see the black shadow of the river beneath rising nearer and nearer, when suddenly a dark object rose in her path, she felt a clutch, and the next moment was sliding and falling with a weight upon her body. Yet another, and she lay bruised and shaken, a few yards from the still water.

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CHAPTER XI.

By seven o'clock all the guests had arrived at the deanery and were assembled in the drawing-room, the only person who had failed to make her appearance being the daughter of the house. At five minutes past, Prosser, who was always inclined to be slightly piqued at the small amount of service her 'young lady' required from her, was startled to see her descend the stairs attired in a neat new day-dress instead of her evening toilet.

'I am not going in to dinner, Prosser,' she said; 'take this to mamma, and, when you can, bring me some soup, a large bowlful, to my room.'

Shortly after Prosser had handed the little note with a request for excuse to Mrs. Marchant, the guests trooped across the hall. Katherine watched them unperceived from the dark gallery overhead.

'Be quick! be quick!' she whispered, 'I want

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you all to go. I want the evening to be over.' She looked at her father—'For then I shall know,'—she said the words as though she were speaking to him—'I shall know whether you are on my side or on theirs.'

She went into her own rooms; re-emerged from them to wait till Prosser brought her the soup she had ordered, and then returned with it, shutting her door—to wait.

Down stairs, for the second time that day, Mrs. Marchant felt her daughter to be a thorn in her flesh. No notes sent in at the last moment were sufficient to make her excuse Katherine's conduct. She had excited too much comment already by refusing to act like ordinary people, and her second non-appearance only gave fresh emphasis to her first. Behind her smiles she hid a bitter annoyance.

Conversation and congratulation on the completion of the great work, 'On the Rôle played by Accent in Latin Verse,' were general in the early part of the evening. Later on, when the gentlemen had come into the drawing-room and the ice was thoroughly broken, it became more exciting and personal. As her mother had feared, Katherine's absence was noted.

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'So that high and mighty young person, Katherine Marchant, does not vouchsafe us her presence any more than she thought fit to do this afternoon,' observed the Reverend Mr. Manders, turning over the leaves of a photographic album.

Mr. Gilliard-Smith sat opposite him on the other side of a card table, while his wife and Miss Carter made up a *partie carrée*.

'Well,' said the latter gentleman, 'the Dean seems to give her credit for a good deal of hard work in the preparation of this work which is shortly to be published.'

'It seems very nice she should be of so much use to him,' put in Mrs. Gilliard-Smith, with her usual meekness.

Miss Carter followed suit. 'At the same time,' she said, 'it must be very sad for him. It would have been bad enough, wouldn't it, if he had had sons who were not quite steady —well, that's only natural; unfortunately every one understands that—but when it's a girl—'

'Dear me,' broke in Mrs. Gilliard-Smith, with nervous intentness, 'you don't mean to say that she's done anything wrong. I always knew that she was free-thinking and queer, and

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all that, but surely— She was *so* kind to me when I was ill, I shouldn't like to think—'

'My dear,' interrupted her husband with judicial severity, 'I am not aware that any one was making any charge against Miss Marchant's personal character. We were only deploring what must inevitably be a source of great pain to her father. We cannot blind ourselves to the fact that she is not what the daughter of the Dean of Allington should be.'

'Quite so; quite so;' said Mr. Manders, with a solemn shake of the head. He did not forget that she had once laughed—actually laughed at him.

'I always said,' he continued, 'and I still maintain, that these women's colleges are the nursing-places of that agnosticism and infidelity against which the church is bound to be upon her guard. It is deplorable beyond measure that women should be allowed to flock to these Nunehams and Girtons, there to unsex themselves at their own free-will.'

'Unsex,' re-echoed Mr. Gilliard-Smith with unction, 'that is the exact word, Manders, the exact word, and he patted his wife complacently on the shoulder, doubtless comparing her in his

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own mind with the unsexed modern women under discussion. Was it to be hoped that any of the new upstart order would fulfil the end of their being as this model wife had done. She had borne him twelve children uncomplainingly; she had never ceased to stitch and mend and make; she had invariably admired his sermons, and seen that his dinners were according to his taste. Would it be safe to foretell of these others that they would conserve the peace and sanctity of the home in the same exemplary manner.' 'No, no,' he murmured, beating time to the monosyllables in two more approving little pats on Mrs. Gilliard-Smith's ample shoulders. 'Unsexed! unsexed!' He shook his head with a melancholy which had a certain satisfaction in it.

'But she is really so good-natured,' put in the last-named lady, in a sort of flattering defence. 'I know she's not quite like other people,' she went on gathering courage as she proceeded, 'but she really can't help that. She was born so— I'm sure she was. Oh, I shall never forget one very hot day—it really was *frightfully* hot, just after I had been ill, Mrs. Marchant was so kind as to take me out in her

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carriage, and insisted on my having four o'clock tea with her. As we were crossing the hall, we heard little Kittie—they called her Kittie then —talking in the dining-room, and we looked in —and what do you think? If she hadn't got two Italian boys and a monkey out of the street, and was giving them jam and cake out of the side-board cupboard. Of course it was very naughty, and the beautiful carpet was in a dreadful mess; it was most annoying, yet she meant it kindly, you know.'

'Yes, yes,' said Mr. Manders, 'there, we see, don't we, that the child is mother to the woman? We see the beginning of a tendency to refuse to use the proper channels of charitable and philanthropic efforts in favour of her own quixotic schemes. I have no doubt something of that sort was at the bottom of her not turning up at the ceremony to-day. Ah, here is the Dean—will you cut, Miss Carter?'

The evening passed pleasantly enough, and Mrs. Marchant saw with satisfaction that Hilary paid a considerable amount of languid attention to Katie Henderson, and cherished hopes that something might be definitely settled between them before he departed for the south. The

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Dean was a little perturbed at his daughter's absence. He hoped she had not delayed changing her wet clothes and so taken cold. Doubtless she was disappointed, and it had cost her considerable pain to arrive at her decision. He only hoped that in time she might come to realise that this single disappointment took the place of many others.

Up stairs, the buzz of conversation, the occasional music, broke the quiet of Katharine's rooms. The evening seemed long to her because she waited. When the time came for departure she heard the stir in the hall, the opening and shutting of the front door, with relief. Once, looking down from the gallery, she saw Hilary and Miss Henderson disappear together, and realised that fully half the guests still remained in the drawing-room. There was nothing for it but to control her impatience still longer.

At last every one had departed—the Dean, with the satisfaction of having performed a painful duty, which was a periodic necessity belonging to his position, once more breathed the congenial atmosphere of his study, which greeted him with its accustomed air of quiet

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and repose, whatever signs of mild disturbance might be visible in other parts of the house. He seated himself with a book in his hands, according to his old custom, though he had long ceased to be able to read except in the most favourable light, and his thoughts naturally turned to surmises with regard to the sensation to be produced on the publication of his new work, and the probable opinions its appearance would elucidate from the leading philological lights, Professors Moncrieff and Lloyd Dryhurst. He wondered if Katharine had gone to bed, with a wish that the harmony of their relations, so disturbed during the last few days, might be re-established. Would she come down to say good-night to him, according to her old custom? His meditations were interrupted by the appearance of his wife, who rarely invaded his study at this or any other hour. He felt slightly annoyed as she seated herself comfortably in the armchair opposite his own, and reflected with irritation that he should be obliged to tell of Katharine's decision and listen to her triumphant comments upon it. With highly sensitive pride he hated any criticism on the action of

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the creature he was fond of, resenting it almost as keenly as if it had been applied to his own. She was full of the triumphs of the evening, and required little more than that he should supply certain monosyllables when she appealed to him. Suddenly he became aware that the conversation had taken a new turn—what was this about Graves, of all people?

'Prosser tells me there must have been quite a scene in the Cathedral,' she said, concluding her sentence.

'I did not quite catch all you said, Ellen. What did you say Graves found there?'

The door opened, and Katharine came into the room. A curious change had come over her since the afternoon. The stony, sorrowful woman, in damp garments with the wet drops upon her hair, had completely altered. About her was an alert, decided air. She came very quietly between them and stood facing the fire, half leaning against the large writing table at which they worked together. Mrs. Marchant, full of her theme, hardly noticed the interruption.

'Well, as far as I can make out,' she continued, 'Graves was just on the point of ex-

tinguishing the last light, when he actually discovered a woman almost hidden against the wall.'

Katharine looked up, her straight brows rather severely set.

'This is interesting,' she said. 'One would rather like to know how the excellent Mr. Graves met such an unforeseen incident. Of course his Christian principles would not allow him to forget his usual deference and politeness under such a novel experience.'

'I don't know why you should speak of Graves in that disagreeably sarcastic manner, Katharine," answered her mother. It is a strange thing if the cathedral itself is not to be free from any low person, who may consider it a comfortable place for a night's lodging.'

'The apparition so upset his nerves, I suppose, that his nerves upset his temper. Consequently he must have hunted her out of the place—brutally and harshly turned her out—the girl who had nowhere to go; and so she went to the river.'

'How did you get to know that, Katharine?' asked the Dean. 'I hope——'

'I was in the close, and saw her run out

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straight towards the south corner and the river. I went down over the bank, and so managed to intercept her at the foot of the path as she came rushing along. Otherwise she must infallibly have been drowned, in spite of the humanity of Mr. Graves, who, I suppose, had meanwhile gone home to tea.'

The Dean looked at his daughter with a new admiration. 'My dear,' he said, 'you are not only to be congratulated upon saving a life, but on a real feat of skill and quickness. Not many persons could have gone down that bank at the rate you must have taken.'

'To think,' exclaimed Mrs. Marchant, 'that we should not have heard of it before! How very distressing for you!' She regarded her with astonishment.

'Rather worse for the girl,' replied her daughter, with more decision than politeness. She was rosy in the light of the candles and the fire. Never, the Dean thought with a thrill of admiration, had he seen her look so beautiful.

'And what did you do with the poor thing?' he asked.

'I brought her here. She is up stairs on my bed.'

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The Dean could almost forgive the unwisdom of the act for its generosity. Not so Mrs. Marchant. She walked to the door, which was standing slightly ajar, and shut it fast. She turned with a look of annoyance and displeasure.

'That was the last thing you should have done. Think of the servants. What will people say!'

'Surely that does not matter. What we choose to do can concern no one but ourselves.'

'Katharine, how can you be guilty of such absolute folly? Do you mean to say that you expect me to regard it as an everyday occurrence that you should calmly bring an unfortunate into this house?'

'Unfortunate. She is certainly very unfortunate if you are to grudge her shelter on a night like this.'

"Do not play with words, Katharine. Is it possible that you do not understand? Do you not see that if a poor creature is homeless, and wishes to make away with herself, there must be some reason? On the face of things, I think we can see at a glance that hers is not a *deserving* case.'

'No,' said Katharine, 'I am sure it is n't.'

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'I am glad you admit so much, for, of course, you must then see that it is advisable she should be removed immediately.'

'Where?'

'I should be afraid, Katharine, we could not be far wrong in sending her to the Misericordia. If she cannot walk I must order the carriage, late as it is. Oh, how dreadfully annoying. Of course, every one will know, even if we do not get her off without a scene.'

'Never to that place!' said Katharine. 'And she is asleep.' In her mind's eye she again saw the repose she had brooded over. Her father looked at her. She was very generous and very inexperienced. At the same moment she turned, meeting the admiration in his glance. She moved a step towards him as if to side with her ally, and with a thrill of pleasure he felt that the chasm which had opened between them was bridged over.

'Cuthbert,' said Mrs. Marchant, too much absorbed in her annoyance to notice these subtle signals between them, 'it will be best, will it not, to order the carriage immediately before it grows later?'

'No, Ellen, I do not think so,' he answered.

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Katharine's hand touched his shoulder caressingly. 'I knew,' she said, 'you would not turn her out. You will help me to help her.'

'My dear child,' he answered, 'you must not be too quixotic. You must face facts sensibly, not take a sentimental view of things. She must stay to-night; but I am afraid, upon investigation, it will be found advisable to move the unfortunate girl very soon.'

'Cuthbert,' cried his wife, wringing her hands, 'what *are* you saying! Think of Hilary, and the sort of gossip which will get about. It is dreadfully awkward. Do have some consideration.'

'Why should we think of Hilary?' asked Katharine. 'What has he to do with it?'

The Dean realised the extreme difficulty of the situation.

'My dear,' he said, 'you are innocent and unsuspecting where the generality of people are not so. We must try and avoid scandal for many reasons. We older people know that if this unfortunate girl has no home, she has probably herself to blame. Society offers her a refuge—the Church provides her a chance of repentance.'

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She drew her hand away from his chair.

'Are *you* on the other side?'

'I do not understand you, Katharine. You see there are reasons why we must be circumspect. And it would be foolish to ignore the excellent organisations for dealing with this class of women. Through them the sinner may find peace and repentance, and—'

Katharine laughed. 'Sinner; where's the sin?' she said. 'Repentance; what has she to repent?'

The Dean was silent, not knowing very well how to answer. His girl knew very little of the world. She had been kept secure in the happy innocence of carefully guided young women, and now by an unfortunate accident an ugly knowledge was to be forced upon her. It was almost strange to think that she should have lived so long to know so little—in the white and beautiful purity he hesitated to shock and startle with a hideous reality.

Mrs. Marchant, however, felt nothing but the pressing exigencies of the position, and rushed in to fill the breach.

'I am afraid she has a *great* deal to repent, Katharine, as I should have thought even you

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must have seen. I suppose you have been taken in by some idle tale. A girl cannot easily come to these straits without having lost her purity.'

'Mother, I do not see any reason to conclude that she is less pure than I am.'

'After all,' said her father, 'we must not jump to hasty conclusions. It may be as Katharine says.'

'That is very unlikely,' returned his wife. 'If the girl really intended to commit suicide, she must have had a reason. You have, I suppose, allowed yourself to be taken in by a piteous story.'

'She has told me no story,' answered Katharine quietly. 'I know very well that she is to be a mother.'

'Then from what you say, my only other conclusion is, that you believe her to be married. What madness! Why?'

'On the contrary, I am quite sure she is *not* married.'

There was silence. Mrs. Marchant sank back into her chair while the Dean and Katharine confronted each other. So she knew—she knew—she knew. All along she

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had been guiltless of the ignorance—the innocence with which he had credited her. She had none of the excuse of blindness. 'O God! was it possible, or was it all some hideous dream?'

His wife was the first to speak. 'Have you nothing to say, Cuthbert, when our child dares to speak like this!'

'Hush, Ellen,' he cried. 'Katharine, take back those terrible words. You do not, cannot know what you are saying. You are misled by a girlish pity.'

She said: 'Father, for the first time in my life, it seems to me that I clearly understand what I myself, and you too, are saying.'

He looked at her—met the gaze of her steady quiet eyes, saw the firm *pose* of her figure as she stood with one hand upon the table behind her, and knew that he could no longer keep up his desperate self-deception. Trembling he steadied himself against his chair. 'I command you,' he said, 'as a father a daughter, to retract those wicked words. If you cannot do that—if you have no respect for the authority of the church or society, show that you still have some for us, and let

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the girl leave the house within the next half hour.'

'Father, you too would turn out a homeless, exhausted girl?'

'If you have any respect or care for our wishes, bow to them in this matter.'

'Yes, if she goes now,' said Mrs. Marchant, 'no one need be any the wiser.'

'If she goes now I shall go with her.'

'That is madness,' returned her father; 'you do not know what you are saying.'

'I might as well never have saved her life, if I were going to hand her over to you, who would give her nothing but shame. They sink under the weight you heap upon them. *She* shall not.'

'Then what is to happen?'

'There is nothing for it but for me to go with her. Yes, I will go—I have wasted too much time already in this world of unrealities. I have never lived—now I am going to begin.'

'Katharine, Katharine; to-day you decided to stay with me—will you let a fallen woman part us?'

'Do you not think we are parted far enough already, when the only natural thing for me is

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immoral and monstrous for you, and the only thing you would choose an impossibility for me?'

Mrs Marchant rose with an angry gesture.

'Cuthbert,' she cried, 'you hear now what our only daughter has come to. She prefers a woman of the street to you and me. She actually calls helping you and doing her duty waste of time.' She turned to Katharine. 'After all our care of you, all our indulgence to you, all the splendid education we have given you—you throw up your own father and mother; you give up your home and place in it, simply because we venture to disapprove your bringing a disreputable woman into the deanery.'

'Mother, it is no good to argue any longer.'

'Of course not. Your own mother is not worth it, or capable, I suppose, of understanding you—you the only daughter we have.'

'Ellen,' said her husband, 'I beg of you to be silent; there is no purpose in violence like this.'

She turned on him. 'Now you see what it has come to, Cuthbert; how these fine theories work out.' 'Katharine,' she continued weeping, 'have you no feeling that you can leave us; never mind me, it does not matter about

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me, but your poor father!' 'Yes,' she turned again to her husband, 'I have seen it all. She has been the one you really cared about. *She* understood you; *she* could work with you; *I* was nobody in comparison with her; and now she leaves you for a freak, a mere nothing.'

'Pray leave us, Ellen,' said the Dean, 'there is no good in this.'

'Do you expect me to say nothing, Cuthbert? Am I to have no feelings? You two have always done what you liked. *I* have never interfered or put in a word, and now you expect me not to utter a syllable when my only daughter behaves like this. You tell me nothing, but do you think I have no eyes? You have confided in her your trouble; you have tried to hide it from me, but do you think I do not know that you are growing blind? She knows it, and still she can go. Katharine, have you no pity on your poor, blind father?'

The dean stood up, white-lipped and deadly pale. 'Silence,' he said, 'I want neither pity nor help. Leave us!'

She was frightened. Never before had she seen him look like this. Wounded and miserable, she left them and slowly made her way up

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stairs—sitting down upon the first seat which offered itself upon the landing to review the position undisturbed. She wished Hilary had been at home; he would have taken a sensible view of affairs. Why were women to have the trouble of bearing and rearing daughters if they were to grow up only to behave themselves like this, just when they might be reasonably expected to repay some of the pains spent upon them? Now, she would leave them all for the sake of some miserable girl whom accident had brought across her path, but for whom this misfortune would never have befallen them. Curiosity suddenly impelled her to rise, and drew her to the room in which the creature was lying.

A sitting-room, in which damp garments had been hung to dry, led to the bedroom, which was bright with fire-light. Everything lay in its usual order. In the window crocus-buds were growing out of moss, prim white cusps of the fairies' Byzantine. A Madonna looked down from the wall; a little brown Buddh, from an Indian shrine, gazed in unruffled contemplation towards the centre of disturbance upon the bed. She lay there with features slightly relaxed

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from their wonted expression; her head set straight upon the pillow in the position of one who has lately suffered pain; her still wet hair spread about it—the blankets half thrown off from the lines of her long throat and the curves of young breasts—one coarsened hand stretched out upon the coverlet.

So this was the creature—this, with innocent-seeming face—not one of the girls of town; no broad-shouldered, strapping country wench. Whence had she come to bring desolation upon their house? From the country, if one could judge anything from the cut of her garments in the outer room; a long way from the state of the boots which were drying on the hearth. And why to Allington—to them of all people? She lay there a terrible problem, impossible of solution. Some measures must be taken. Yet what were they to be? What on earth was to be done with her? Of course, Katharine would not carry out her wicked threat to leave with her if they turned her out that night. And yet, she could not tell. At any rate she would have no scruples about making a scene—it was absolutely hopeless to expect from her any precautions against gossip and slander. Her

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attempt to move her at this hour would be fraught with danger—the servants might be disturbed; in any case it would be difficult to keep them in entire ignorance. Yet if they left her where she was till the morrow, in broad relentless daylight, prying eyes and evil tongues would be ready on all sides: a scandal would be inevitable, in which Hilary's name would be mixed up in the most wicked and disagreeable manner. She wished he would come home. He might be of use to her. Hilary—O God! He had once or twice talked strangely in his delirium! She had suspected him of some trouble—a trouble with a girl: what if it should be this one—this one? The thought went through her like the stab of a dagger. In a sudden flash of agony for her son, she caught at the bedpost for support, gasping, horror-stricken, with the perspiration on her forehead.

At the slight movement, which shook the bed, the girl woke. She sat upright in the bed—staring at the face of malignant terror which confronted her. A dim memory of another face which had bent compassionately over her, of hands which had tended her gently, of a low and soothing voice, faded out of her brain and

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died like a dream in the presence of hard reality. The emotion which had taken strongest hold upon her, the hunted sense of cruel fear, revived once more, alone possessing her.

'My clothes,' she said, in an imploring half-whisper. 'Let me go.'

Mrs Marchant saw her opportunity and seized it, fetching the still damp petticoats and shawl from the outer room. She helped the girl to get out of bed, and assisted her in her efforts to drag and fasten them about her, leaving her for one minute to fetch a purse from her room, which she slipped into the pocket of the draggled skirt, with the nearest approach to compunction possible to her in this deed, which was perhaps to save her son. In five minutes the girl was ready. With a gesture, enforcing silence and caution, she beckoned her to follow down the stairs.

The hall was lighted as a rule by large hanging oil lamps, which, according to custom, had been extinguished by the servants before they had gone up to bed. It would now have been totally dark but for one untoward circumstance. The library door, on their right, was standing

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wide open, as Mrs Marchant had left it, and the light from within fell across the open space in front of them in such a way as to render it more than likely that any one crossing it to the door would be visible from within. On the lowest stair they stood immovable—with beating hearts.

Father and daughter still fronted each other. By turns he implored, commanded, besought; begging her to come back to him—to be as she had once been—to restore herself to him in her woman's tenderness and purity—to show some compassion—to remember how he was her father and the affliction with which he had been visited. All the while she listened, outwardly stony and immovable—not daring to trust herself in speech lest she should break down into unreasoning weakness. In all her uneventful life it had been her fortune, good or bad, never to see another human creature suffer pain at her hands, and now he was suffering through her, who had hitherto done all in her power to shield him from his loneliness and blindness. For a moment, physically shaken and unnerved, she saw herself a criminal; and as he changed his position, with a movement

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which was dreadful to her; the listeners without heard her cry to him not to curse her. 'God knows,' was the answer; 'I curse the subtle, poisonous influences which have brought you to this!'

'If you could only understand,' she cried weakly.

'Understand—understand—that you should be the one to strike at all that is holy and good! O God! what have I done to deserve it! Katharine, Katharine—say you will not go—you cannot have the heart. Who is this miserable woman, that she should come between us?'

At this she raised her head and stood upright, with a sudden transition from self-abasement to self-confidence and common sense. Pity, and what was almost self-reproach, had clung about her and nearly pulled her down. She shook them from her and stood free.

'One who has need of me,' she answered. 'One whom I may help.'

The two listeners heard the footstep as she turned to cross the room.

Their chance was nearly gone. The girl turned with an anxious, questioning look, which

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was answered by a nervous push towards the centre of the hall. As she stood one moment on the brink of the lighted space in an agony of apprehension, lest crossing it she should be seen, there was a step without, the click of a key in the latch. As Katharine, throwing the door of the library still wider, let out a broader radius of lamp-light, she saw the strangest scene of all. The man, her brother, and the unfortunate girl fronted each other with a mute stare of horrified recognition.

'Father,' cried Katharine, feeling him close behind her, 'look! Do you see?'

'See!' he cried,' see! It is all dark. My God! it has come upon me. I am blind, blind, blind.'

He reeled—stretching out his hands implor-ingly, and caught at the door-post in default of her. Katharine went swiftly up to the girl and took her by the hand. Hilary had turned, leaving the door still open, and was hanging his hat upon the rack. Drawing the girl after her, she reached her own cap and cloak which were hanging upon it. As she did this she had to reach so close to her brother that he could feel her breath upon his neck.

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It seemed to him that she was standing there an interminable time, and taking his coat from the peg, he carefully readjusted it.

She pulled her garments quickly about her, and without a word the two passed out together, the mother and the son looking blankly after them.

A few steps from the house the girl tried to disengage her hand.

'Miss,' she said, 'dear Miss, please let me go.'

The strange woman held her yet more firmly. She answered—'No, I cannot let you go. You are mine.'

'But, Miss, if you understood—if you knew the things they say—the shame.'

'Shame!' the other laughed a loud defiant laugh, which echoed back to the three in the deanery. 'Shame! There is no shame for you!'

The night was frosty and clear now, after the sleety day. The chimes of half an hour to midnight fell slowly down through the keen air from the tower. The two women could see each other's faces by the light of the stars, and the reflection from the white patches of unmelted snow.

The one kissed the other, and said—'Now

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you will come with me, and be perfectly good for the sake of the little child that is coming to you.'

The other clung to her hand for answer, and the two passed out of the close and down the steep streets of the town.

Half an hour later they were speeding with the night mail to London—and Mary.

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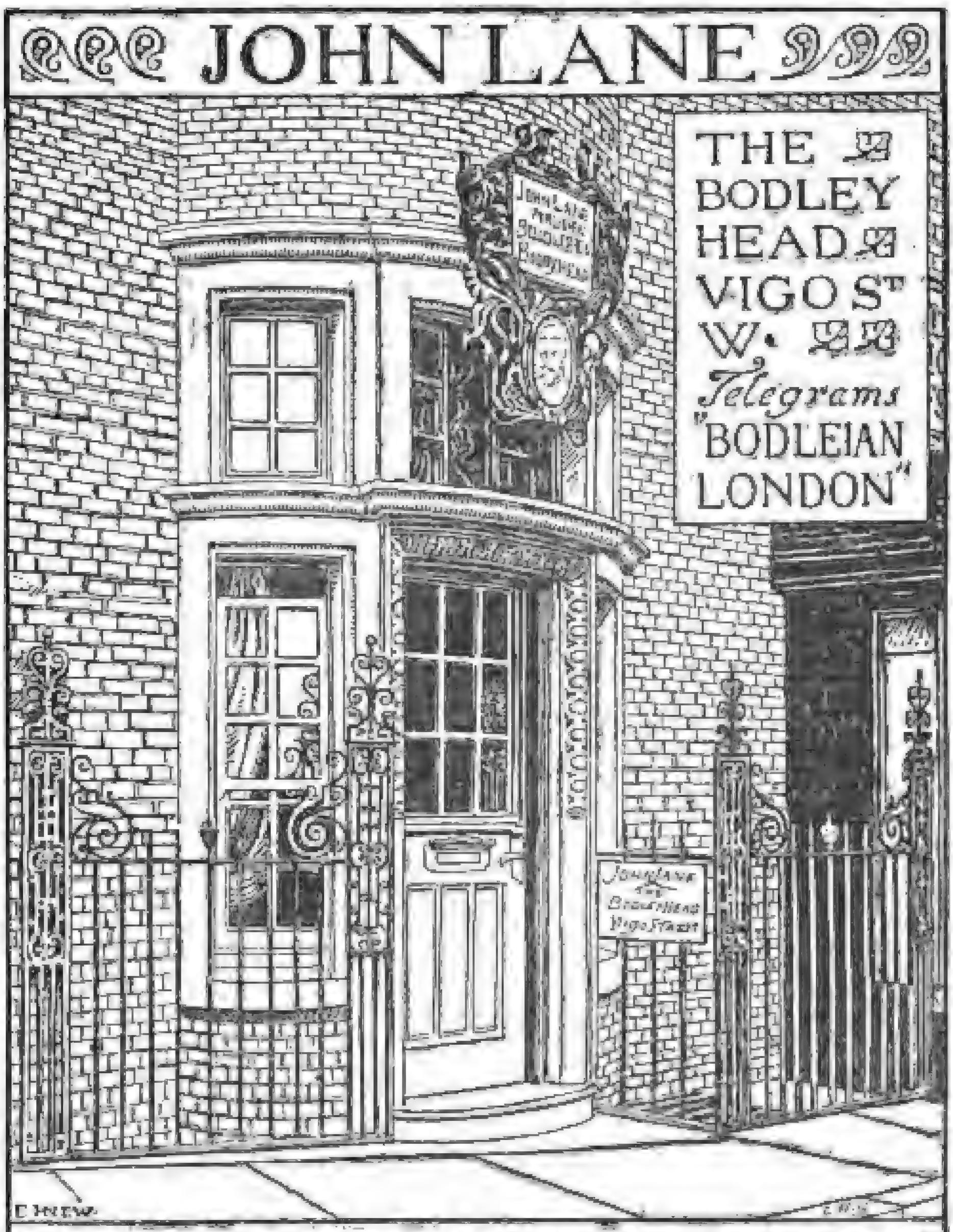
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